

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1968.—VOL. LXXVI.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JANUARY 5, 1901.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



MY LADY SHRIEKED OUT WILDLY, FOR BY THE LIGHT OF THE LAMP SHE SAW CAPTAIN HEATHERLEIGH'S SET, WHITE FACE.

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

SIR LOCKE and my Lady Lister were coming home after an absence of ten years, and our quiet village was all astir with excitement. Arches had been made from the station to the hall, flags waved and bells rang out merrily; everybody wore some little piece of new finery, and a nosegay of brilliant colours; as for me, I felt quite proud of the pretty Mac gown mother had bought me, and prouder still of my cherry ribbon, a present from Stephen Clarke, my sweetheart.

Mother and I stood at the parlour window, watching for the first glimpses of the carriage, whilst father leaned over the park gates talking to some old friends.

Time out of a mind a Bolton had been lodge-keeper to the Listers, and I think sometimes father grieved that he had no son to whom the office could fall. But he comforted himself by saying to mother, "Never mind, old woman, p'raps they'll give the place to Stephen, when we're gone; Phyllis could manage that! Goodness lass! how fine ye'd be with Stephen head-keeper and ye lodge-keeper. It would be easy to save money then."

I was only seventeen then, and when Stephen begged we should be married right off, father said,—

"Nae, nae, lad, let t' lass have some pleasure in her youth; she don't leave this here roof for two years to come. She's only a baby yet."

And though Stephen was eager and did his best to coax father to his way of thinking, he could not move him.

Now, as mother and I stood at the window, scarce daring to sit down, lest we should spoil our fine frocks, Stephen came across the park, and I ran out to meet him.

"You'd be late," I said, looking up at his handsome, grave face. "You ought to have joined the procession twenty minutes since."

"I know, Phyllis dear; but I'll make up for it soon. I couldn't go without a sight of your face, lass; how bright you look and what a colour you've got! Now give me a flower for my button-hole, and I'll be off."

I gathered a great purple pansy and pinned it in his coat, standing on tip-toe to do it; then he stooped his tall head and kissed me as calmly as though no one could see, and strode away through the big gates which father opened for him.

He could not have been away twenty minutes before we heard loud shouts and cheering.

"They're come, Phyllis," said mother, and ran outside, I following. I was very proud of mother that day, she looked so pretty and comfortable in her plum-coloured gown, and neat cap; I thought then, and I think now, there was never such a loving, womanly woman as my mother.

Her rosy cheeks had grown a little pale with excitement, her soft dark eyes were all aglow. I put my arm about her saying,—

"How pretty you are, dear," and she laughed and blushed like any girl.

"They'll be here soon," she said the next moment. "I'm wondering, Phyl, if my lady has changed. She was a rare, handsome one ten years ago, poor lady!" and she sighed sympathetically.

I said nothing, asked no questions, the story was not unknown to me; there were many gossipers in Westworth, and I had learned all there was to learn about Sir Locke and my lady, quite without my mother's assistance; when I had ventured to ask her any question about the lord of the manor she had always said it was not seemly to talk of our betters without respect.

Yet I knew that twelve years ago Sir Locke Lister had married a beautiful lady named Judith Vernon—folks said because she was rich; she was only eighteen then, and had been engaged to Captain Grey Heatherleigh, who had a nice place five miles from Westworth; but in some way the lovers were parted, and Mr. Vernon, who thought more of a title than his daughter's happiness, had married her to Sir Locke, whilst her poor heart was still sore with the belief that the Captain had been untrue.

People said she had been very proud and cold to the gentry, very good to the poor; and it was said, too, that Sir Locke did not treat her well.

Then her baby came, and she grew happier, but trouble seemed to follow her. The baby died before it was nine months old; some said Sir Locke was not guiltless of its death, that in a drunken freak he had tossed it high laughing loudly at its screams, and that at last, missing his catch, he had allowed the poor mite to fall to the ground.

Nothing was ever proved; my lady was silent, the doctor discreet, but from that day she was a changed woman, and shortly after she went abroad with her husband in search of health.

That was ten years ago, and I had no remembrance of my lady's face, nothing but a dreamy recollection of a beautiful woman, richly dressed, who had kissed me and cried a little over me. When I asked Stephen why she had remained so long from England, he answered:

"Because Sir Locke is a brute, he spent all her father's fortune, in less than two years, and then was obliged to go abroad, and live cheap; now, my lady has just come into some more money, so they've made for home. I guess none o' us will love the master too well."

I thought of all these things as I stood close to the lodge gates, and I felt such pity for Lady Lister that I was hardly conscious of the shouts which came nearer and nearer still, or the low rumble of carriage wheels until mother touched my arm, and said,—

"Lass, art dreaming! Look! here they come!" and in a moment father had flung wide the gates, and followed by a great crowd, the carriage entered.

Sir Locke was bowing and smiling in every direction; my lady scarcely smiled at all, but sat pale and weary beside him.

I thought I had never seen so beautiful a face as that which suddenly turned upon us. It was quite colourless, and very, very sad; but, in spite of its scorn and pride, it was lovely.

The great brown eyes looked out at us from under low brows, the beautiful mouth suddenly smiled. And, ah! what a smile that was!

She said something to Sir Locke, who instantly stopped the carriage, and beckoned me to approach.

I obeyed, trembling and blushing, very awkward in my shyness.

My lady bent forward, and looking earnestly down at me, said,—

"Who are you, child? What is your name?"

"I am Phyllis Bolton, my lady; your lodge-keeper's daughter."

"Stay at home to-morrow, Phyllis; I shall have something to say to you."

And then the carriage rolled by, leaving me

bewildered rather than glad; and I did not like the bold look Sir Locke had given me.

There was much feasting and merriment on the great front lawn that night, and everyone was in the highest of spirits.

My lady was not visible; but just as it was growing dusk Sir Locke came out and spoke a few words to us.

His voice was already husky, and his words muddled; and I heard old Simon, the gardener, say,—

"He's at it again. I misdoubt but he'll make ducks and drakes of my lady's money, as he did afore."

I thought a great deal of Lady Lister that night as I lay in my own little room, and wondered what she could possibly have to say to me—to me, little Phyllis Bolton, who at a distance already worshipped her for her beauty and her kindness.

At breakfast the next morning mother said,—

"I'm wondering why my lady picked Phyl out from all the rest, and what it is she wants of her. Phyl, my dear, don't let your head be turned by a great lady's notice."

"Now, mother," said my father, smiling over at me, "leave t' child alone. O' course her ladyship has an eye for a bit o' prettiness; and praps she wants the child about her. She's a splendid woman, ain't she, Phyl? My goodness, what a pair her and the Captain would be made!"

"Hush!" said mother, prudently, and spoke of other things.

I went about the house all that morning like one in a dream; and when my work was finished mother sent me to put on a clean cotton gown, because she said there was no telling when my lady would come.

And sure enough I had hardly finished dressing when mother called me down, and I went, trembling and blushing, into our little parlour, where my lady was sitting.

She turned to me with a faint, sweet smile, which made her face more beautiful than ever, and spoke in a soft, low tone.

"So you are the little Phyllis I used to pet long ago. I should not have known you again. Come here and sit beside me. I want to talk to you."

And as I obeyed, she went on,—

"I have been talking of you to your mother, and in return she has told me you are already engaged. I wish you all happiness, Phyllis. And I think Stephen Clarke is a very worthy young man; but I am glad—yes, most glad—that you are not to be married for a long while yet."

I murmured something, I hardly know what, and my lady listened with a smile.

Then she said, gently,—

"Phyllis, I have been telling your mother that I want a maid. Just as we were on the point of crossing the Channel mine left me, and I have had no time to engage another. Would you be willing to come to the Hall?"

"Oh, my lady!" I said, "I am so ignorant, I know nothing of the duties. I—I should not please you at all."

"The duties are very light, Phyllis, and I would teach you them. I have a fancy, too, that you would grow attached to me. Won't you come!" with so much sweetness that I longed to go with her at once; but mother answered for me.

"If Phyllis is willing, my lady, I have nothing to say against it, and she'd be near to home; but I must ask her father and Stephen first; they're most concerned in her doing."

"Yes, yes. And if they raise no objection, what then, Phyllis?"

"I will do as you wish, my lady, only I am so ignorant."

"We will soon remedy that, and I fancy you don't do yourself justice."

"She's a beautiful needlewoman," mother said, smiling over at me, "and she's quick to learn, and though I wouldn't seem to flatter her she's a good girl with a good temper."

My lady rose.

"I can easily believe that, Mrs. Bolton; and when am I to have my answer? Will you bring

it to the Hall to-night? And, remember, if you decide for Phyllis to come she shall see you every evening."

Then she took up her sunshade and went out. We watched her walking slowly across the park, a tall, beautiful figure in black draperies, and mother's face was very pitiful as she said,—

"Poor lady! It's easy to see she's miserable; and, oh! Phyl, what will your father say to this new plan?"

Father felt flattered for my sake, and said it would be a good thing for me, though he should miss me about the house; but, lass," he added, "you'll learn summat up at the house, as you never could here; and, maybe, it'll stand you in good stead one o' these days. I'm but a rough sort o' man, and your mother, God bless her, is like a lady a side o' me. You learn to be like her, Phyl!"

Stephen was harder to move, but at last he gave in; but I saw he was not pleased for me to go and I was sorry.

CHAPTER II.

In a week my duties were easy to me. My lady proved the most kind and patient mistress, instructing me in all things, treating me with such tenderness—such goodness, that I found it an easy thing to love her with all my heart.

She was anxious too to improve my poor stock of knowledge, and herself superintended my lessons.

I have learned since Stephen objected to this; he was afraid I should grow ashamed of him, as if I could! but mother was very proud; and father said,—

"Let t' lass alone, Steve, it pleases her and her leddyship; no harm 'll come o' it."

I had been five days at the Hall before I encountered Sir Locke. I met him then on the stairs, and made way for him to pass. But he stopped, and leaning oddly at me, turned my face toward him.

"Well, Phyllis," he said, "have you nothing to say to me; what a pretty little witch you've grown. 'Pon my word I must snatch one kiss from that rosy-bud mouth!"

"Sir Locke!" I cried, dismayed and ashamed, when suddenly a clear, cold voice from above, said, "Sir Locke, be pleased to release Phyllis. She is not here for your amusement."

Instantly his swaggering air dropped from him, and he went downstairs quickly, while I ran up to join my mistress.

She did not speak until we were safe in her room, and then she laid her two hands on my shoulders and looked into my eyes so sadly, oh! so despairingly, that I cried out,—

"Oh, my dear lady! oh, my dear lady!" and could scarcely help crying.

"Phyllis," she said, at last, "do not tell any one of this, or you will be taken from me. I promise Sir Locke shall not repeat his offence, and you—you care for me a little!"

I lifted one white hand to mine (I wonder now at my boldness), and kissed it.

"I will stay, dear mistress, so long as you need me," I said, and her lovely eyes were full of tears as she thanked me.

That afternoon some ladies visited her, and I waited upon them in her boudoir. She seemed to like me about her always then, and I wondered how she could seem so calm and quiet, when I knew how much she had suffered and was suffering.

"We shall be quite gay," said one lady, a newcomer in our party. "I understand Captain Heatherleigh is coming home next week, he has sold out."

I glanced towards my lady; she was a little paler than usual, and I thought her lips trembled a moment; but presently she said,—

"He will be quite an addition to our circle. Is he yet married?"

"No; he is a sworn bachelor. I have heard he had a disappointment years ago," and then a meaning look from another guest made her stop short in confusion, but my lady was equal to the occasion. "Heatherleigh Court is too beautiful

to be without a mistress," she said, and so dismissed the subject.

There were many times when I did not understand my mistress, sometimes even when I was a little afraid of her. She would sit for hours with her chin resting in her hollowed palm, her great dark eyes staring moodily before her, her lips set in a hard line. I used to wonder then of what she was thinking, and wish I could comfort her if ever so little.

It was not a happy house. In a short while I learned Sir Locke was a confirmed drunkard and gambler, and sometimes I heard high words between him and my lady.

He was always in the wrong, and she had suffered so long she could no more be patient or forgiving—once in my presence he swore at her. I never shall forget how she looked—how she spoke the one word "silence!"

She rose from her seat, and moved towards him, a beautiful figure in shining raiment and glittering jewels, but her face was white, and her eyes burned with a sudden dreadful fire.

"Silence," she said again, "you must not go too far, and he shrunk back ever so little from her. "I will bear no further insults."

"Don't put on your confounded tragedy airs, Judith," he muttered coarsely, "why don't you make yourself agreeable!"

"Agreeable," she laughed, but her laugh was sad to hear.

"What inducement or reward do you hold out to me! Some women, under my wrongs, would have gone mad, some would have risen against you," then remembering me, she broke off suddenly, and by a gesture dismissed him.

Then she sank into a chair and laughed again, and all my heart ached for her, but she was so strong, so proud, and in a moment called me to do her hair in that pretty way I had lately learned. That night she dined out, and I watched her go, thinking in all the land there was no lady to compare with mine.

She was splendidly dressed, in wine-coloured plush with diamonds about her throat and wrists, in the heavy masses of her raven hair, and any man but Sir Locke must have been proud of her.

Contrary to her wish I sat up that night for her! I was not weary, and it was my pleasure to minister to her in all things. I was reading a book she had lent me, and the time passed so quickly, that I was surprised when I heard carriage wheels along the drive.

I went hastily out upon the landing, and then I saw a tall, beautiful figure running up the stairs, and my lady's face was so white and wild that my heart almost stood still. I went to meet her, but she thrust me aside roughly, and without a word entered her room, locking the door upon me.

Some terrible trouble had befallen her, I thought, and I could not leave her utterly alone, so I crouched on the mat outside her door, waiting for her to call me. All night long I stayed, but the summons never came, and through all those heavy hours I heard her pacing to and fro and moaning in her pain. At break of day I stole to my own room, to ponder what all this could mean; later, much later, I learned that she had been brought face to face with her first and last love, and that although no word had passed between them, the sight of him, the memory of the past had proved too much even for my dear mistress.

In the morning she was her ordinary self, although her face was a shade paler, her eyes gloomier than I had ever seen them. She said in answer to all inquiries that "her head ached and the best remedy for it was a long brisk walk," then bade me dress and go with her.

I was very proud to be her chosen companion, and as we passed the Lodge gave mother a triumphant look; so we passed out of the park, on to the high road, and from thence to the woods.

My lady talked wisely and kindly, even, I thought, with some affection for me in her voice, and I longed to tell her how I worshipped and loved her.

We gathered quite a handful of wild flowers, and my mistress tied them together with a wisp of grass, turning to me with a faint smile to say

she had not felt so young for many days, when I suddenly saw her face grow rigid, and her eyes glanced round as though seeking some way of escape; and I started when, at a little distance, I saw Captain Heatherleigh standing amongst the trees as white as my lady herself.

No meeting could have been more unlooked for, less desired; but the Captain quickly recovered himself and came towards us with outstretched hand.

"Judith—Lady Lister! this is an unexpected—"

"Not pleasure," she interrupted, half-wildly. "Do not mock me, Captain Heatherleigh," and when I would have gone she held me fast, as though she feared to be alone with him and her own sad heart.

"I wish you welcome home," he said, ignoring her words. "Perhaps English air will be good for you. You are not looking well."

"I am never ill; Phyllis here can answer for me. I am quite vulgarly strong," and I had never heard her speak so quickly.

"You have not forgotten your favourite pursuit!" he said, with a glance at her flowers. "Do you remember—I—I beg your pardon—old memories are always foolish! But, Judith, will you give me these?" lightly touching her nosegay.

Just a moment she held them towards him, whilst her breath came hard and fast, then she dashed them to the ground and trampled them under her feet.

"No," she said, half-fiercely, "no, you have no right to ask so much," and suddenly turned from him, dragging me with her.

When we had gone a little way I looked back and saw him standing there, the poor, bruised flowers in his hand, his face, stricken with pain and despair, bowed over them.

"Oh, my lady! oh, my lady!" I cried, breathless with the hurry we made, but she did not seem to hear me; her breath came in great gasps, and her beautiful eyes stared stonily before her. But all in a minute she turned to me.

"Phyllis," she said in a whisper, "Phyllis, you have read something of my past—of my wretched, wretched story. Be true to me. Look it away in your own breast. Oh, child! oh, child! I keep faith with your lover. Be very careful not to heed evil tales people may tell you of him—"

I lifted her hand and kissed it, crying, bitterly over her woe.

After that my lady often met Captain Heatherleigh in company, and I always knew when she had seen him, because she would come home white and weary, and sit for hours with her hands clasped about her knees, her eyes heavy with tears she would not shed.

She was a very proud and a very strong woman, or she could not have lived the life she did, with all its care and shame; for was it not shame to her that all the county, high or low, spoke of Sir Locke's dreadful habits and vices, that his drunken orgies were known to one and all!

And sometimes he would force an entrance to her rooms and abuse her in language such as I had never before heard.

At such times I have seen her stand with her head reared high, her proud, beautiful face so white and set, bent full upon him, and her lips closed tightly, as though she feared to speak the thoughts that were in her heart.

Oh! my mistress! oh! my mistress! what wonder your great soul failed you at last!

One day Sir Locke told her Captain Heatherleigh had accepted an informal invite to dinner, and in company with three other gentlemen would present himself at seven o'clock that evening.

He looked at her insolently as he spoke, but she never winced, the expression of her face never changed, and he seemed annoyed by this. He was savagely bent on rousing some show of feeling in her.

"Will it not seem strange, Judith," he said with a brutal laugh, "to entertain both lover and husband at your own board! 'Pon my soul, I can't congratulate you on your first choice. Grey Heatherleigh is as guant as a scarecrow, and looks

fifty—do you think it is because of your summary rejection of him!"

"We are not alone," she answered icily, but he laughed again.

"Oh, where's the use of keeping peace before Phyllis; she has known the story long enough, never fear. Your affection for the gallant captain was too pronounced to be easily forgotten; and isn't it strange he should only return home after society knew you were settled at Wentworth?"

If possible, my lady's face grew a shade paler, but she answered steadily.

"Do not go too far, Sir Locke, my patience is nearly exhausted," and pointed to the door. Even he saw it was better to leave her then, and swung out of the room noisily; then my lady walked to a window, and stood there with hands fast locked, and I heard her say under her breath, "Heaven help me, Heaven teach me to remember I am his wife."

CHAPTER III.

I REMEMBER that night very distinctly; my mistress seemed careless of her dress, and chose a robe of black velvet, with white lace about the throat and elbows. It made her look paler, but it could not spoil her wonderful beauty; and when I had dressed her dark hair, and fastened the diamond pins, I thought she was perfect. But she looked at herself in the mirror with a little bitter smile, and said, "a study in black and white! I am quite funeral."

Then she went down, and I sat sewing in my lady's chamber, just above the drawing-room; it was a lovely night, and all the windows were flung open, so that I could hear the voices of Sir Locke and his friends as they played billiards and grumbled that "Heatherleigh" was late. My lady walked to and fro on the terrace, her head a little bent, her hands loosely clasped before her. Presently I heard a quick step, and the next moment I saw the Captain hurrying towards her; she stood still until he joined her, with the one word, "Judith," and she answered wearily and sorrowfully. "Why have you come?"

I would not, for a king's ransom, epy upon my mistress, and I left my seat hurriedly; when at last I resumed it the guests had gone in to dinner, and I sewed on, sick at heart for those two poor souls.

After awhile I knew the gentlemen were sitting over their wine, because their voices grew louder and rougher; and presently I heard my lady playing soft snatches of music. I let my work fall on my lap and listened until the tears came to my eyes—it was so sad, so sweet; the burden of my lady's woe seemed breathing through the music, and I who loved her so well was unable to help or comfort her.

She played on and on, until the twilight fell, and must have cast heavy shadows in the drawing-room; then suddenly her music ceased, and I heard Sir Locke asking roughly what she meant by sitting like an owl in the dark.

Her answer was so low it did not reach me, but I trembled for her. Sir Locke's voice told too truly how heavily he had been drinking, but for awhile there seemed no reason for my fear, no sound but the murmur of voices reached me, and I was beginning to feel secure when Sir Locke said, loudly,—

"Judith, you will drive over to Shawley's to-morrow, he has a fine collic I want you to see."

My lady's answer did not reach me, but I felt sure she would refuse to obey. Mr. Shawley, although one of the guests, bore a terrible character in the county; no lady reacquainted him abroad, and the Hall was the only house open to him. So I was not surprised when Sir Locke shouted,—

"What, you won't go! Why, madam! Am I not master here! Shawley, you may expect my lady at twelve, precisely."

"Do nothing of the kind, sir," my mistress broke in. "I yet have some remnant of pride,

some respect for the name you would have me drag in the dirt, as you are doing."

"What! you insult my friend, and in my house!"

"It would be impossible to insult Mr. Shawley; say, rather his presence here is an outrage upon me."

Then he called her by a name so foul, so terrible that the men cried out shame upon him; there was the sound of a sharp scuffle, a woman's cry and then I saw Sir Locke and Captain Heatherleigh out upon the terrace wrestling each with the other, and I held my breath for very fear.

It was vain that the other gentlemen tried to part them and a moment my mistress stood silent watching them, as though it went against her will to save Sir Locke his just punishment—then she ran forward, crying,—

"For my sake, for my sake end this most unseemly struggle."

"Stand back, my lady," the Captain said, sternly; "this is my quarrel." And with a sudden great effort, he hurled Sir Locke to the ground.

He was up in a moment, mad with drink and anger, and the struggle would have begun again, only my dear mistress threw herself between them.

"Strike," she said, in a strange, hard voice, "and let your blows fall on me. I can bear them more easily than the scandal that must come of this affray."

Captain Heatherleigh fell back.

"I will obey you this once, but it is against my will," and, turning on his heel, he walked slowly away, never remembering he was hatless.

Sir Locke raved and stormed, but my lady never answered a word, only she begged the guests to go, to leave her husband to her charge; and I think they were all too glad to obey—certain it is, not one lingered behind to give her that protection she so sorely needed.

Then, although I believe it was cruel as death to her, to give Sir Locke any assistance, she made him lean upon her arm, and led him back to the drawing room, he cursing and swearing at her the whole while.

She made no answer for a long time, and I, shivering in the lonely room, feared she had fainted; but at last, when the storm of dreadful abuse grew more violent each moment, and I felt I must rush to my lady's help, she spoke.

"Silence!" she said in a terrible voice "How dare you so address me, so degrade me! Let me pass. I will hear no more."

"Where are you going—to Grey Heatherleigh? Madam, do you think I'm blind to your love for the gallant Captain! But, by Heaven, if you ever do dishonour to my name I'll kill you!"

"That would be merciful compared with your present conduct," she said.

"Oh, no doubt I'm a brute, a villain! I can quite believe I don't escape 'scot free' when you entertain your prim and proper friends; but I would like to know if you can deny you still love that fellow!"

"I scorn to deny it!" she retorted, hotly. "Once in my life it was given me to know a man worthy of all love, all honour. Like a fool I listened to evil tales of him; like a fool I allowed myself to be coerced into a wicked and bitter marriage. I have my reward. What love and what esteem do you suppose I can have for a drunkard, a profligate, for a man who systematically ill-treats his wife, subjects her to countless indignities and pains! Oh, Heaven! what have I done that I should be so sorely punished!"

"What have you done! Why, disappointed and scorned me—yes, me, madam," with drunken boastfulness, "Sir Locke later, the last of the Lesters, with whom you were unworthy to mate! Woman, I hate you! I hate your proud ways and your pale face! It gives me the horrors! I wish I had let you go your own way, and marry that idiot Heatherleigh! I am sick to death of daily seeing you!"

"You have your remedy," she said icily. "I should be glad to know we should never meet

again; gladder still if I could cast aside that name you have made a disgrace to all who bear it!"

"You will have it, then, will you?" he said, hoarsely, and I screamed aloud as I heard the fall of a heavy blow, and ran downstairs, meeting the butler half-way.

"Where are you going," he asked. "Stop, Phyllis! there'll be murder done in this house yet; but you can do no good."

I scarcely heard him. I know I never answered; all my heart was full of my dear mistress, all my soul was wild with fear for her.

I rushed into the drawing-room. My dear lady was standing in the full light, her head thrown back, her eyes flashing fire, her face as white as snow, save where the fall of brutal fingers had left a scarlet mark.

Sir Locke, a little sobered by her expression, looked at her with drunken fear; but when I entered he lurched towards me, saying with an oath,—

"It's pretty Phyllis! And, Phyllis, my dear, we've had—a jolly row."

"Stand back!" I cried. "Do not touch me!" (I fancy he was not nearly so tipsy as he would have us believe.) "Oh, my lady! oh, my dear lady! come away!" But she neither heard nor moved.

I clung to her weeping, but her face never lost its fixed and stony look.

"Mistress! mistress!" I sobbed. "Come with me; you are ill—unhappy."

That last word stirred her ever so little.

"Unhappy, yes," and she offered no resistance when I attempted to draw her away.

We went slowly upstairs together, my arm about her waist, for I thought she would fall. And when we came into her own room she walked steadily up to the mirror, and smiled a dreadful smile when she saw the print of his fingers still upon her cheek.

As for me, I sobbed aloud, and she turned, still with the strange look in her eyes.

"Why do you cry, Phyllis! I have no tears—I, the wounded one. Come nearer, child, and see what tokens of my lord's affection I bear with me."

She lifted her sleeve as she spoke, and showed the fair arm all bruised and discoloured.

"His doing," she remarked, with a short laugh. "But I am wrong to trouble you. Go to bed, child, and forget there is such sorrow as mine in the world."

"As if I could! Oh, my lady! my lady! let me stay with you. I will not speak unless you wish it; I will only watch over and pray for you. Do not send me away, I beg you."

So I pleaded, and her beautiful face softened as she listened.

"Stay if you wish it," she said, very gently. "You are a good child, and I think you love me."

Then she moved to a window, and sinking down on her knees, looked out desperately on the beautiful, quiet world.

Very, very slowly the hours wore by, and the room was so quiet I could hear the beating of my own heart.

My lady's face had fallen on her arms, and I wondered if she slept—I hoped so.

All through the weary night I prayed Heaven to be good to her, to comfort that proud, sad heart, to strengthen her to bear her lot.

The pale stars faded one by one out of the brightening sky, a faint breeze of morning rustled the leaves about the window, and wafted the scent of the roses towards me, and one or two birds began to twitter under the eaves.

My mistress lifted her head, and without glancing round, said,—

"Have you slept, Phyllis, at all?"

I answered no, and she was full of concern now.

"Go to your room, child; you are too young to bear a long night watch easily."

"I am not tired, my lady," I said, quickly, "let me stay with you until the morning comes."

"It is already breaking. See how the sky is changing. And you need have no fear for me now, I am strong again;" but her dear voice

faltered, and her face worked convulsively. I went to her then. "Let me get you something, my lady, you are faint!"

But with a dreadful sob she crouched at my feet, crying,—

"Pray for me! pray for me! that I may be kept pure. Oh, child! oh, child! what a night I have spent! What terrible temptations have assailed me. There was murder in my heart when I came to this room; but thank Heaven, my anger is spent, but my heart is like lead in my bosom. I am alone—alone—alone!"

Oh, what was there was in her wailing cry. I sank on my knees beside her, and my love made me bold to speak.

"Never alone, dear lady, while I live. I am a poor ignorant girl, but I love you as well as though I were a lady born. Oh, mistress, take me, and use me as you will. My joy will be to serve you!"

And then she put her arms about my neck, and kissed me once upon the mouth, saying,—

"Heaven has given me a blessing in you!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE next day my mistress could not walk abroad, for her face was disfigured by bruises, so she and I wandered about the park and the little wood beyond.

Sir Locke had gone to London, and for this one day at least we had peace in the house. Never by word or look did my lady refer to the cruel events of last night, and I was so wishtful to turn her thoughts to happier things that I chatted like a magpie of everything under the sun.

And she listened with her own gracious smile, and a far away look in her deep eyes, and did her best to seem interested.

I was growing very tired when she proposed going home, and I gladly turned to retrace my steps, when I saw Captain Heatherleigh coming towards us.

My lady drew her breath hard, and, not knowing what she did, gripped my arm fiercely. Her face had grown so much paler that the purple bruises showed the more plainly, and as the Captain's eyes fell upon them he started, grew as white as she, and a dangerous look came over his handsome face.

"He struck you, Judith!" he said, in a low, strange voice.

"It is nothing," she answered, swiftly, "please to forget it," and would have passed on, but he stayed her. "Send your maid away I want to speak to you alone."

But she would not let me go. I think she was afraid her strength would fail her.

"No; Phyllis does not leave me; say what you have to say before her, she is not only trustworthy, but she loves me."

He looked vexed, but seeing how immovable she was made no further attempt to shake her decision, and I, feeling very awkward and uneasy, fell a little behind my lady, and I tried vainly not to hear the words they spoke.

"Judith," the Captain said, in such a wistful tone that my eyes filled with tears, "how much longer is this to go on?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, as though not understanding.

"Can you ask! How long are you going to submit to this man's brutality! To endure insults and gloominess. You have your remedy, any day you can obtain a separation."

"And of what use would that be! No, Captain Heatherleigh. I am too proud a woman to air my wrongs before the public, and even if we separated I should still bear his name, and remain his lawful wife."

"It is infamous that he should go unpunished," he cried, passionately, "Judith, for your own sake you must leave him or one day there will be murder done."

"I feel that—I know it; but I cannot go; and if he takes my life there will be nobody to care, and I shall be the happier, at least, I hope so."

"You have grown morbid; but surely, Judith,

you should acquaint your friends with the state of affairs; they might do something to ameliorate your lot."

"Have you forgotten what manner of friends mine are, Grey?" bitterly. "In all the world I stand alone, but for this good and faithful girl," and, turning, she laid her hand affectionately upon my arm.

"Not alone so long as I live!" the Captain cried, reproachfully. "Judith, have I proved so unfaithful in the past, so forgetful of an old love that you should doubt me in the present?"

All her face changed and softened at his words, and she stretched out her hand to him.

"I wronged you, Grey—my friend, now and always—but the world will not permit you and me to have any intercourse."

"Why should we care for the world, being conscious of our own integrity? Let me see you daily, counsel and comfort you, protect you to the utmost of my power; Judith, say you agree!"

"No, no; do not you tempt me, Grey; the path I tread is rough and stony, do not make it perilous. But I thank you, oh, from my bruised and broken heart, I thank you for your goodness—your forgetfulness of my past distrust, and all the misery it has wrought. And now, good-bye!"

"Not yet; I have much to say. You will let me meet you sometimes to assure myself that you are well."

"No, no; oh, I cannot, I dare not! You do not understand how displeasing it would be to Sir Locke to know I sometimes exchanged words with the man he now is pleased to call his enemy."

"Why are you so obstinate? Why do you study him so greatly?"

"Because, Heaven help me! he is my husband. Good-bye, once again. Let me go, I have borne as much as I can bear."

He caught her hand and kissed it; then releasing her suddenly, almost violently, strode away, and my lady, sinking down upon the ground, covered her white face with her trembling hands, and I think for awhile she was praying. When she looked up again she was her old calm, proud self.

"Come, Phyllis!" she said, "luncheon will be waiting," and without further speech she led the way back to the Hall.

My mistress had been strong to resist Captain Heatherleigh's entreaties that morning, but I soon knew that her strength had given way; that meetings between them were not infrequent, that wherever she went her old lover waylaid her, and she had neither courage nor heart to send him away.

I believed then, and I believe now, that there was no guile in their souls at that time, that no evil thoughts would have come to them had Sir Locke behaved with anything like decency towards my lady. But all the same I knew such meetings were dangerous, and that already people were beginning to talk lightly of my dear, unhappy mistress.

But what could I do? I, a poor, ignorant maid, had no power to stop their tongues, or spare her one pang. Even mother began to shake her head and say it would be better for me to leave the Hall and return home; and frightened by the thought of my lady's loneliness if I left her, I spoke to father; he was a very easy-going man at ordinary times, but could be stern and obstinate enough when he thought needful; and now he brought his great honest hand down on the table heavily, and said,—

"Let 't' lass alone; who knows but she may coom 'twixt my laddy and temptation. Heaven knows her laddyship's tried sore enow, and no Bolton shall make her trouble bigger. Stay where thou art, lass, and Heaven 't' bless ye," and with that he kissed me. But mother said, anxiously,—

"You've clean forgot Steve, father; surely he's got a right to say his say about Phyllis."

"And what does Steve say?" I asked, growing sick at heart.

"More'n he ought by a great sight," retorted father, "he's over ready to think ill o' my laddy, and he wants ye to home." But even if

you do coom, there ain't goin' to be no talk o' marriage yeh. Can't ye stay and see him, little Phyllis?"

"No, dear. I must be getting back; but I'm thinking Steve has said more than he means; anyhow I won't leave my lady just now—oh! you can't think what a cruel life she leads and how kind she is to all."

"It 'ud be a hard mistress who could be aught else to ye, lass," father said, lovingly, and, putting on his hat, walked with me across the park, kissing me before we parted.

I went up to my lady's boudoir with a heavy heart; it would be terrible to grieve or anger Stephen, and would make me very unhappy, and yet I felt my duty was to my lady there, that he could better spare me just now than she could.

I was so quiet that evening that my mistress pressed me for a cause, but for a long while I was silent, afraid to say what was in my mind; but when she still urged me, gently, I gathered my poor little stock of courage together, and said,—

"Oh, my lady, my lady! if only you would not meet Captain Heatherleigh!"

She blushed to the roots of her hair, and half turned from me, and her voice was all shaken and hoarse, as she said,—

"Who has told you I meet him? They might have left me your respect."

"Nothing can change that, dear mistress; but people are cruel, and do not know you as I do! Oh, for your own sake, my lady, give them no cause to speak ill of you."

"And if they do, why should I care?" with bitter pride, but the next moment her mood changed, and sinking down on her knees beside me she hid her face in my gown, and moaned a little as if in pain. Then she said, "Phyllis, I have done wrong in seeing him, although, indeed, all the world might hear what has passed between us, and could not condemn us; but my name is my only treasure now, and you shall help me to guard it. To-day I will not go out. Oh, Heaven! how hard it is to deny oneself the only gleam of sunshine in a dark life!"

I tried to thank her for her goodness in hearing me so patiently, in listening to the advice of one so ignorant as I; but I broke down, and shed foolish tears, and in an instant she had roused herself.

She took me in her arms and held me fast, whilst she kissed me gently on the mouth, and I felt her tears warm upon my cheek.

The next day she did not leave the house, and no visitors came.

Ladies were chary of calling when Sir Locke was at home; but I saw that my mistress believed the slight was intended for her, and that she was doubly miserable.

Day after day passed, and still she remained a prisoner. I think she hoped to weary Captain Heatherleigh in his search for her.

And when a week had passed she sent me into the village for some ribbons for a new gown she had given me.

I think she fancied I should meet the Captain, and warn him of her intention to see him no more. If she did, she guessed rightly, for half-way to the shop I came upon him, looking very haggard and distressed.

"Phyllis," he said, eagerly, "where is your mistress? What has happened? Is she ill?"

"My lady is well," I answered; "but she has learned that the people are saying cruel and false things of her, and has determined not to see you any more, unless on company with Sir Locke."

His face went quite white, and his gray eyes flashed angrily.

"Who has dared to speak ill of her?" he asked, almost roughly. "By Heaven! this is too much! She is as far above this common herd as the sun above the earth, poor girl! poor girl!" and his voice grew tender again. "Can't she have one friend?"

"Captain Heatherleigh," I said, "no one knows my lady's goodness so well as I; but I know, too, where she is weak, and where danger waits for her. You loved her once, you love her now, and so you must not meet. It will be selfish to try

and see her; and if you care for her unselfishly you will not do so."

He frowned upon me standing there.

"You are young to be so worldly-wise and so hard," he said.

"I am not too young to hold my lady's honour and happiness dear."

"And you think I would wreck the one and fall to make the other?"

"You have no right to talk to me in such a fashion, Captain Heatherleigh! My mistress, as Sir Locke's wife, should be sacred to you."

"And is she not? I would not harm a hair of her head! I only seek to save her from self-destruction—from misery."

"You will only destroy her if you thrust yourself upon her," I said sadly. "Already the ladies hold aloof from her, and her name (Heaven knows how unjustly!) is on every lip. You are working her worse misery every day, and I cannot stand by and see it—I must speak!"

"What would you have me do?" he asked, bitterly. "Because of a censorious world is Lady Lister always to stand alone? Her friends will not help her, and daily she endures untold shame and humiliation. Any man would stretch out his hand to help her."

"Any man but yourself might do so. Oh, Captain Heatherleigh! be good to my lady. It is hard for you I know, but harder still for her. She is only a woman—a woman sorely tried. You, if indeed you would help her, must do so by leaving her undisturbed."

He stood silent a moment, then he said,—

"Will you carry a note to her?" But I shook my head; and he cried angrily, "You are a good girl, and faithful; but you carry your prudence too far. Will you object to taking a message?"

"No; I will do that."

"Tell her, then, her wishes shall be obeyed. I will not seek her again unless she is in sore need of me."

CHAPTER V.

A DAY or two after that meeting, as I sat sewing in a little ante-chamber, Stephen joined me. I fancied he looked displeased, but I made no remark on that, only questioned what brought him there at such an unusual time, and how he managed to find me.

"Oh," he said, "Jane brought me to the landing, and I have come to speak seriously to you. Phyllis, how red you have grown! I believe you know what I am going to say; but first tell me where is her ladyship?" and turning, he closed the door.

"She is waiting," I answered, a trifle angered by his manner.

"I'm glad to find you alone," and then he came and sat beside me, with his arm about my waist, but he seemed very ill at ease.

"Phyllis, there must be an end to this!" he said at last, and I questioned with dry lips. "An end to what, Stephen? Speak out, please."

"And so I will," almost roughly, "you must leave her ladyship's service, and go home. I won't allow you to stay here longer."

"Stay," I pleaded. "I do not think you understand."

"Oh! I understand too well! Lady Lister's name is in everyone's mouth, and as you are as much her friend as her maid, your name will suffer too. It shall not be; you've got nothing else beside, and if your people haven't the sense to look after you, I must."

"I am in no danger of losing my good name," I said, speaking as gently as I could, "and, Stephen, I cannot, I will not bear my lady spoken lightly of."

"Very well, you place her before me. Is that as it should be?"

"You know it is not so; but just now, when her life is so hard, when all her friends are deserting her, and temptation is all around and about her, I cannot, I dare not leave her, I am all she has."

"You forget Captain Heatherleigh; doubtless he will console her for your loss," Stephen sneered, now thoroughly angry.

"For shame," I cried, "oh Stephen, I did not

believe you so hard. If you saw what I see daily, heard what I hear, your heart would bleed for our unhappy mistress. There is not a cotter's wife who suffers more abuse, is more frequently struck and sworn at. Oh, Stephen! Stephen, say that it is your pleasure I shall stay with her still!"

But his face had hardened.

"Choose between us," he said, "if she is first and dearest, I have nothing more to say; only remember if you refuse to please me in this thing, when I leave you, I am a free man. My wife must have no slur on her name."

"It rests with you whether our engagement is broken or not," I said, trying to speak steadily, and praying Heaven would keep me true to my mistress.

I felt then as certain that if I left her she would rush on self-destruction as I was certain I loved Stephen. It was hard to cross him, hard to oppose him so resolutely, but were it to be done again I would do it.

"Then I am to wish you good-bye! Well, lass, you've deceived me cruelly. You've chosen to stay on in the midst of riches, perhaps because I've little to offer you, and if evil comes of it, there's none to blame but yourself. But I'll never forgive you, before Heaven I'll never forgive you for spurning my life."

He stood looking at me, white and stern, and I crept a little nearer to him, feeling that my heart would break.

"Stephen," I pleaded, "Stephen, dear, be just to me; and if we are to part, let us part as friends, not in anger," but he held me away, frowning down at me. Then, all in a moment, I saw my lady standing in the doorway, very pale, with her deep eyes full of wonder.

"What does this mean?" she asked, in her slow, soft voice. "Phyllis, what has happened? Why are you crying, child?" but I could not answer, and she turned to Stephen. "You must tell me," and he said, almost bluntly,—

"We have quarrelled, your ladyship, and it's best we should part now, before it's too late."

At the want of respect in his voice she winced a moment, then said, quietly,—

"You are hardly yourself, Clarke, or you would not adopt such a tone to me. Is it out of my province to inquire the reason for your dispute? Phyllis is not quarrelsome."

"Well, my lady," said Stephen, sturdily, "we've been engaged nigh two years now, and it's high time we thought of marrying. I want her to give up service and go home."

"Even then you would be no nearer marriage. Mr. Bolton will not let Phyllis sacrifice her youth. You have another reason?"

He flushed, could not look at her for a moment, then he said,—

"I have another reason, my lady; and I think you know it."

"How should I?" with her coldest air. "Please enlighten me," and she sat down with her hands loosely folded before her.

"My lady, you should not compel me to speak. You ought to have mercy on yourself. I—I do not think—you are fitted—to—to—"

"Go on," and now her dark eyes were black as night.

"I—I think Phyllis would be better and safer at home."

"What is your reason for thinking so?"

"My lady," he said, indignantly, "you should not force me to say unpleasant things. You must know very well that people talk openly of you and Captain Heatherleigh."

She was white to the lips, but she gave no other sign of pain.

"And what do they call me?" she asked, in a low tone.

"If you will have it, my lady—a light woman."

She rose then to her full height.

"Go," she said. "This is too much. I have lived too long when one of my servants is bold enough to say such words to me. That being your opinion of me, Stephen Clarke, take this poor girl with you. The shadow of my shame shall not touch her," and she took my hand and strove to lead me to him; but I was angry with

him, sick to the heart for her, and I clung to her, crying I would not leave her.

"You silly child," she said, with a little sob. "On the one hand is happiness and home, on the other servitude and a possibility of reproach. Do not cry so. See, your lover is waiting for you—"

"She comes willingly or not at all," said Stephen; and then I knelt at my lady's feet, weeping.

I could not leave her lonely, praying her not to send me away, and I heard my sweetheart's voice saying,—

"You have decided—then good-bye, and may all your life be the darker for this one hour's cruelty."

"Stay," my lady said, coldly, "give her another chance; she is so young, so young—oh, Heaven, how cruel men are! Phyllis, Phyllis, my child, do not send your lover away, you will be sorry when it is too late."

"I can do no other thing," I said, "but if he would wish me good-bye, kindly, I would be glad. If he will only be patient I will come to him yet."

"Will you come now?" he asked from the doorway.

"I cannot!"

And then I heard his footsteps echo down the long corridors and the creak of stairs, but I did not cry then, all power to do so had left me, and I only felt a vague pity for myself.

I could hardly understand he was lost to me for ever, and for the first and last time in my life I was bitterly ashamed of and angry with him.

How dare he so insult my dear mistress! How could he stoop to think evil of her! And with her arms about me I tried to believe that my life would be happy, I hoped and prayed that I had not sinned in sending him from me. I had thought it impossible she could be gentler or kinder to me than before; but I was wrong, she now treated me more as a younger sister than a humble maid, and strove by every means in her power to make me forget my sorrow.

I was not so weak as to show my grief to all who cared to see it. I think my lady's example had made me strong; but none the less in secret I brooded over my shattered hopes and the joys I thought would never be mine now; and, although angry with Stephen, I vowed in my heart to love him as long as my life should last.

My dear father agreed I could not act otherwise, and was very angry with Stephen, but for the first time in my life there was a cloud between mother and me, and I saw she held me in the wrong and pitied Stephen.

I was hurt, but I could do no other than my duty, and in the dark days that followed I was glad to remember I had clung to my lady in and through all.

Sir Locke was much away at this time, and we heard Captain Heatherleigh was absent too, so that we were free to walk or drive where we would; but the ladies glanced so curiously at my lady when they chanced to meet her, exchanged such cruel looks, that she kept more than ever to the house, and in consequence grew paler and thinner.

One afternoon when I had gone down to see mother we were greatly surprised by the entrance of Sir Locke, who had come unexpectedly from London, and had walked the whole way from the station.

"You did not expect me back so soon, Mrs. Bolton," he said, airily, "and Phyllis, to what good fortune do I owe this meeting? How could her ladyship spare her favourite?"

"My lady had letters to write, and thought I would like to come home for an hour. She is always considerate."

"That is news; but now, pretty Phyllis, hurry away and prepare your mistress for my coming. I have business to discuss with Bolton, and shall not reach the Hall for another hour."

I was only too glad to do his bidding, and finding my lady in her boudoir, delivered Sir Locke's message.

She grew a little paler than before, and I

thought she trembled, although she forced herself to smile.

"Come, Phyllis," she said, with a sort of forced gaiety, "I must make a becoming toilet; Sir Locke likes to see me bravely dressed."

And I saw she was bent upon meeting him in a kindly way, anxious to keep peace with him at any cost.

She chose a beautiful dress of apricot silk, trimmed with lace of deeper shade, and I fastened rubies about her lovely throat and wrists, and in the masses of her wonderful hair.

She looked all warmth and light, and she had even taught her sad mouth to smile when Sir Locke came through the hall.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," she said, gently, and extended her hand.

He laughed out, loudly,—

"What's the game, Judith? You aren't often so civil! But, by Jove, you are looking first rate; never saw you in better form. Who dines with us to-night?"

"We are alone! Do you not prefer it?" still very gently.

"Well, for once in my life I do; I've got something to say to you presently, my lady. Oh, don't look so startled, it is pleasant news," and then they went away together, my dear mistress striving bravely to look and speak kindly to this man she loathed and feared.

The next hour or two passed quietly enough, and I hoped that Sir Locke had returned to his senses. I might as well have hoped one day to be a great lady.

Suddenly we were all startled by the sound of something falling, and an angry voice cursing and swearing. I started to my feet, but Jemson, the butler, held me back.

"You can do no good, Phyllis," he said, "stay here, my lady will take care of herself."

I begged him to go to her, but he replied, that although he was devoted to our mistress, he did not think it wise to interfere, and having a mother dependent upon him, he could not risk losing his situation; so there I stayed, more frightened than I can tell, and still that coarse voice raged on, but never an answer from my lady could we hear.

At last the drawing-room door opened and some one came out. A little later my mistress rang for me, and afraid of what I should see I went to her. She stood by an open window, in all her brave dress and fine jewels, and her cheeks were white as death, her eyes shone like fire; and every bit of softness had gone from face or form.

"Come here, Phyllis," she said in a hard tone, "and give your counsel to a desperate woman. I am going away from here!"

CHAPTER VI.

"Oh, my lady, no! Where could you go?"

"I don't know! I don't know," wildly.

"Will you come with me?"

"Anywhere, everywhere; but, my lady, think, don't act so rashly that you may be sorry all your life."

She laid her hands upon my shoulders, and her eyes seemed to burn into mine.

"I shall go mad under such burdens as I daily bear; better to go while yet I am free of crime, while yet I have my reason. Hear what I can tell, Phyllis, and then say if it is not wiser to leave this terrible place at once and for ever."

She paused then, and I waited patiently for her to speak again, and after a little while she went on.

"I could bear blows. I have borne them often but such an indignity as he would put upon me now I will not bear. There is a woman, a dreadful woman, of whom he is enamoured—so base that society has cast her outside the pale—so beautiful that she steals men's hearts and maddens their senses—and he insists I shall receive her and her train of friends and lovers on Tuesday next. Phyllis, she is young, but already has passed through a divorce court, and ruined more young men than I care to think about. Answer me, child, what is my duty?"

"It cannot be your duty to receive so dreadful a creature."

"Well, then, there is nothing to do but to go away. Are you afraid of poverty, Phyllis, for I shall be poor—the settlements were all in his favour."

I hastened to assure her that rich or poor I would always be her faithful servant, her humble, loyal friend, if indeed I might claim so sweet a name.

But I prayed her to be patient, to give Sir Locke one more chance; and if he saw she was fully resolved not to receive his guests, he would surely not press the point.

For a long while she would not hear me, but at last she turned quickly and caught my hands, whilst she said,—

"Heaven sent you to me to save my soul; it shall be as you advise, Phyllis. But if he will not withdraw his invitation, on the day that Lady Clara Kenwood enters this house I leave it for all time."

I was glad to win even this promise from her, and when I saw how sweet and gracious she was to Sir Locke in the days that followed I hoped for the best.

He was sulky and hard to please, but not violent as he generally was, and I know my lady thought he would yield to her, that he was ashamed to remember the insult he would have put upon her.

On the Monday I met Stephen; he had not spoken to me since that dreadful day on which we parted, but now he stopped and said, sternly,—

"Do you know what sort of visitors are expected at the Hall to-morrow?"

"I do not think they are expected any longer," I answered, "and I cannot understand how you have learned anything of the affair."

"Oh! some of the servants are not so close as you," he said, crossly, "and they have talked about it in the village. You can't stop their tongues any more than you can stop my ears."

"You are not yourself, Stephen, or you would not speak in such a way to me. Please believe that Lady Kenwood is not coming."

"But I tell you she is; Blunsom has orders to meet the five o'clock train, and Sir Locke himself will take the dog-cart."

"Then my lady has her remedy, she will know what to do."

"So then you intend to stay at that cursed place until your name is gone, and—"

"Don't go too far; my lady will take good care of me."

"I wish to Heaven I had never seen you!" he cried, violently. "You have spoiled my life, and destroyed my faith in all women. Oh! you should be well content, Mistress Phyllis, you have much to answer for."

"Don't misjudge me, Stephen; when you are calm you will regret your words and your suspicions."

"Oh! I am calm enough, and—and content enough. Never fear, you'll soon hear of me as a happy married man no doubt; I am only halting in my choice between two women."

"You are so unlike yourself," I said sadly, "that I am afraid you have been drinking. But whatever you do, wherever you go, you have my prayers and my good wishes. Good-bye, Stephen," and I would stay to say no more lest all my courage and strength should fail me, but his mocking laugh followed me.

I would not tell my lady what I had heard, lest it should drive her to some rash act; I would wait until the morrow, and if indeed this was truth, then Heaven help my poor mistress.

Tuesday came, and Sir Locke was very uneasy in his manner, and watched my lady furtively from under his shaggy brows; she herself was quite calm, although she bade me pack a small trunk.

"He will surely not insult me so grossly as to bring that woman here," she said, "but it is best to be prepared."

The day wore by heavily enough, and whilst I was preparing the five o'clock tea I saw Blunsom drive down to the lodge gates;

shortly after, Sir Locke followed in the dog-cart.

I looked towards my lady. She was ashen white, but she said nothing, although she was shivering, as though with cold. She even took up a book, and pretended to read; and in this way an hour passed by.

Then we heard the sound of wheels, and my mistress ran to a window with a low, sharp cry,—

"Oh, Heaven!" and there she stood a moment as still as a statue; then she turned to me, "Bring me my cloak; quick, quick, Phyllis!" and I hurried to obey.

Hardly knowing what she did, she wrapped herself in it, and, drawing the hood about her head, bade me follow her into the hall.

Some of the servants were already gathered there, but my mistress did not seem to see them; she only waited in stony silence until Sir Locke came in with a lady upon his arm.

He started when he saw his wife dressed for walking; but, determined to carry out his wicked will, spoke with loud-jollity,—

"My dear, let me introduce you to my friend, Lady Clara Kenwood."

My lady flashed one glance at the beautiful, fair, evil face, then, quietly ignoring the offered hand, said,—

"Sir Locke, you have chosen to insult me before your whole household, and from this hour I owe you no duty—I will pay you none. This is the first time a woman with no claim to virtue has ever disgraced your house by her presence."

Lady Clara laughed in a dreadful way.

"You should have prepared me for this, Locke," she said. "I had no idea I was to meet a saint or a prude."

"Look here, Judith," he shouted, "I have sworn you shall entertain my friends right royally, and if you refuse, well and good. You shall never enter my house again."

"I do not intend." Then, to Lady Clara's followers, "Stand aside, if you please, and let me pass!" and they fell back at the word, so that she walked through their midst, awing them to silence by her look and manner.

Once out of the hall, she grasped my hand tightly, and hurried me along until I was breathless.

And so at last we came to the lodge, and mother stood at the door to meet us.

To her my dear mistress said in a low, hard voice,—

"Mrs. Bolton, will you give shelter for a few days to a homeless, friendless woman, maddened with grief and shame?"

"Oh, my lady! my lady! that you should ask such a thing of me! Come in, come in, and rest you. Perhaps it is not so bad as you think."

She laughed bitterly.

"It is worse than you can conceive. But please let me have a room where I may be quiet a little. I want to be alone, I have so much to do."

"My lady," whispered mother, "let it be nothing rash. Remember that the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb, and that your life is not your own."

"You need not fear that I shall take it," my lady said, wearily. "I shall not give Sir Locke so much satisfaction," and she followed mother up the narrow staircase to the room which once was mine.

We did not see her again that night, and no message from the Hall came to us; but in the morning she joined us at our early breakfast, saying she wished to be as one of the family, and that mother was on no account to make any alteration in her housekeeping for her sake.

Afterwards she wrote some letters to her friends, and then we sat in the little parlour, my lady trying to fix her attention on some sewing she had begged of mother.

We were very quiet, but outside all the world was gay. The birds' singing, the cheery voices of men and children came to us through the open window; and at last, over and above all the sounds of the late summer day came the trampling of horses' feet, and my lady drew back.

Then we heard father go out, and soon quite

a company of people rode slowly by, headed by Sir Locke and Lady Clara, who swept the whole house with her beautiful, disdainful eyes.

She said something to her companion, and both laughed out merrily, whilst my lady winced, and her hands lay clenched in the folds of her skirts.

In the few days that followed we saw much of these visitors; and once that dreadful, shameless woman was bold enough to leave her card at the door, but no other creature ventured near, although the county people were beginning to pity my dear mistress, and kindly notes came to her, but not one word of comfort or advice from her unusual relatives.

And when she had been with us a week, she began to speak of her future.

"I must do something to earn my bread," she said, wearily; "and I have some influence yet. I must try and find some pupils who require a competent and well-bred music teacher; and Phyllis shall come with me, if you will spare her, Mrs. Bolton!"

Mother looked grave and pitiful, and counselled patience, but my mistress did not seem to hear.

"I must get away from here," she said, "or I may do you harm with Sir Locke, and I shall be happier where I am not known."

So the slow days went on, and folks told dreadful tales of the orgies up at the Hall. One by one the servants were leaving only to be replaced by creatures of Lady Clara's, and Sir Locke was in ill-favour with all.

It was not often my lady ventured abroad, but one evening, being restless, she took up a wrap about her head and shoulders and left the Lodge alone, saying she would not be gone long. I begged I might go with her, but she shook her head.

"I want solitude, Phyllis, to-night."

It was very late when she returned, and there was something so strange in her manner that I was frightened.

She would not look at me, and her usually pale face was flushed, her eyes too bright.

When I followed her to her room she said, almost sharply,—

"Go away, I want to be alone," then seeing that I was much hurt, in her own gentle, graceful way she came towards me, and, taking my hand, begged me to pardon her because she was so very miserable, and seemed about to kiss me, but instead fell suddenly at my feet in a shivering, crouching way.

I would have lifted her in my arms, but she cried,—

"No, no, little Phyllis, not you. I am a wicked woman. Heaven forgive me! It is not meet you should touch me," and prayed me with wild words to go away.

I was more troubled and perplexed than I can say, and it seemed impossible to me that I could sleep, but I suppose I was very tired for I soon fell into an uneasy slumber, from which I was aroused by a small shower of gravel thrown upon my window.

Opening it I looked down, and out of the darkness came a voice I knew was Stephen's.

"For Heaven's sake come down!" it said, eagerly. "I must see you to-night."

CHAPTER VII.

I WAS not a little startled, and, afraid of what I scarcely knew, hesitated a moment, and Stephen pleaded urgently,—

"Do come, Phyllis. It is of my lady I must speak."

"Is she in danger?" I asked.

"Terrible danger, but not from Sir Locke. You only can save her."

"Wait for me. I will be with you directly," and I began to dress hastily; then I stole noiselessly down, and opening the door, bade Stephen enter.

The first thing he did was to take my hand and say,—

"Are you still angry with me, little Phyl? Don't you ever mean to forgive me? I know I was a brute to you."

"You did not come at this hour to tell me that!"

I answered, trying hard to hide my sudden joy at hearing he loved me still.

"No, indeed, though I've wanted to say it often. Phyl, I was too hard with her ladyship. I didn't make allowance for many things. I hardly understood how evil her life was. I am sorry. And I've humbled myself so much, dear, won't you take me back again and love me as before!"

"I will love you more," I said, with all my heart. "But now do not talk of ourselves, tell me how I can serve my lady."

"Well, this is just it Phyl, I'd been over to see my mother and had stopped later than I meant, so to get quickly back I came through Throssel's Wood; you see I know every step of the way, and didn't care a fig about the darkness. But half way through I caught my foot in some brambles, and down I went like a shot here. I wasn't hurt, only very much shaken, and I lay still a little while to get over the shock, and while I lay there I heard voices, and one was a woman's, and before I'd done wondering what brought her there, I recognised it as my lady's. Some instinct told me to keep quiet, and there I lay until they were along side of me, she and Captain Heatherleigh, and she, poor soul, was crying in an awful way. Suddenly she stopped and said, 'Do not tempt me farther, Grey. I'm mad with my misery, the heaped-up insults flung upon me. Yes, I love you, I love you, but love is not for me.'"

Then he began to reproach her, that her love was less than his, to tell her she was no longer bound to Sir Locke, that she belonged to him and no other; that if only she would go away with him, he would marry her as soon as possible. He was wrong, it was unmanly of him to take advantage of her love and despair, and yet I pitied him; he so cast about to find excuses for himself, and I think he worships her. Well, the long and short of it is, Phyl, that she gave in at last.

"Oh, no, no!" I cried, "it cannot be; oh, my lady, my dear unhappy lady!"

"Hush! you'll wake the others. It's all true, Phyl, as true as gospel, and though it might be a mean thing to do, I kept quiet and listened to the arrangement the Captain was making. I knew at last my lady was too good a woman to be left to ruin. To-morrow night the Captain is to drive down to Netley Corner, and my lady will meet him there at half-past ten, when she counts all here will be safe in bed. Then they will go to Thorpe, from Thorpe to Dover and so to France—after that was agreed upon they parted, and my lady would not so much as give him a kiss, but I heard her sobbing as she went her way, and I heard him groan out a prayer for pardon. I would not hurry here; I wanted to see you alone, and I knew a visit from me would make the old folks suspicious, and perhaps alarm my lady, but now—"

"But now what shall we do?" I cried, distressfully, "oh, Stephen, help me! I seem to have grown stupid with this shock."

"You must keep her from this step, at any cost; think, my girl, what it means for her, and—and Phyl, don't ever let her know how you got your information, it would kill her to think I was the tale-bearer; by Heaven, I never shall forgive myself for the words I said to her once."

"Don't remember them now, Stephen dear; but tell me how to act."

"You must tell my lady you have learned everything, and that if she goes, you go too. There must be no shilly-shally doings; you must be as determined as you were when you sent me away" (this with a gleam of mischief in his eyes), "and now I'm going, or we shall waken the old folks. Good-bye, little Phyl, good-bye, my darling, keep a brave heart, and if ever you prayed earnestly, pray to-night for those two poor souls."

And when he was gone, I crept up to my room weeping bitterly; if I had been brave I should have gone at once to my lady; but I am a miserable coward, and until morning dawned, I lay shivering and wretched on my bed.

With the new day my trouble only increased, and I could not muster sufficient courage to speak to my lady.

The change in her almost broke my heart.

She avoided me as much as possible, and requested that her meals should be served in her own room, alas! poor lady, they came down untouched.

And there she sat all that live-long day with her cheeks like snow, and her eyes all ablaze with shame and pain; her hands were fast clasped, and her figure was quite rigid.

Once, with a spurt of courage, I went to her.

"My lady, my lady!" I said, "what have I done! Are you angry with me! Oh, believe, I love you, and would save you from all—all danger, if only I could."

"Go away!" she said, without turning her weary head, "I cannot bear you near me."

"I cannot leave you alone and unhappy, dear mistress!"

"Leave me!" was all she answered, and when I had shut the door I heard her cry out, "Heaven help me! Even she will loathe me soon," and all my soul yearned to comfort her to whom no comfort would ever come.

And so the short day closed in, and at evening my work was not begun; but gradually the way grew clearer before me, and in consequence I became calmer.

I determined not to go to bed, but to wait with my door open until my mistress should pass on her way to the stairs, and then to follow her with entreaties, ays, even threats, rather than leave her to work out her ruin.

She said gently that she should not require my services that night, that she was tired and should soon sleep, and when with a heavy heart I turned to go, she called me back.

"You look pale and ill, Phyllis, and I think I know this cause. Stephen has proved obdurate; but he will soon return. Forget, child, I ever thought of taking you with me. You are best at home; but, Phyllis, when you are happy and honoured, think sometimes with compassion of the wretched woman you once called mistress, and pray that she may not be thrust utterly beyond the pale of grace. And if—little children come to you, be wise and kind to guide them, that they may not become such as I."

And then before I could speak, she had cast a heavy gold chain about my neck, and sobbing,—"Do not disdain to wear it," thrust me from the room.

I stood in the open doorway listening for my lady's step, and when all the house had grown quiet, I heard her gently open her door, then came the soft rustle of her skirts, and I stood still while she passed me.

She went quickly, and breathed hard like one who was running. I heard her slip the bolt, and then I followed.

It was a dark night, and I could only just distinguish my lady's figure before me. How loudly my steps seemed to fall upon the drive! They startled her, and just a moment she halted. In that moment I had come up with her and seized her poor cold hand.

"My lady," I sobbed, "my lady, no! This thing must not be."

Even in the darkness I saw her face as white as snow, and her eyes flashed wildly down on me. I think in this hour she was mad with shame and anguish.

"Go back!" she said, in a strained, unnatural voice, "go back, this is no place for you. You should not have come!"

And then I forgot my fear. "Dear mistress," I said, "I know all the truth—the dreadful truth, and am here to save you!"

"To save me!" she cried, passionately. "Ah, Heaven! that is impossible! I am a lost soul; let me go, Phyllis—let me go," and she would have broken from me, but strength came to me in my hour of need, and I held her fast.

"Oh! my lady," I pleaded, "bear your cross a little longer, and surely help must come to you; if you go to night, think of what all your after life must be, of the shame that will be yours, that will kill your love and—and his. A union so unholy can only bring with it a curse."

"Hush, hush," she said, "my heart is breaking now."

But there is yet hope for you—if you go there will be none; and when he, your lover, sees you

shunned of all good women, finds himself an outcast, and for your sake, he will hate you."

"No," she said, sullenly, "his love, like mine, is eternal."

"It is not love at all that can so degrade its object; oh, my dear, dear mistress, on my knees I beg you, as you value your immortal soul, return with me; to-morrow you will be glad," and I knelt there in the darkness weeping as though my heart would break; she never shed a tear.

"I shall never be glad again," she said, passionately, "but where I go I shall have love, and all my heart is thirsting for it. Let folks say what they will, I shall not hear them; listen to me, Phyllis, let me for once speak of my wrongs. Heaven knows I have kept silent through long years, until often I think I am going mad."

"I have been scorned, insulted, beaten and reviled by the man whose name I bear; my little innocent baby was made an instrument of torture to me. Ah, Heaven! I could have borne even that had she but lived; but he killed her, he, her father! and yet I lived on with him, because I remembered the words of that ceremony which was such a mockery for us."

"Year in and year out he laboured to debase me, to make wickedness attractive to me, to drag me to his own level. There have been times when I have felt I could murder him, when I have rushed away from the mere sight of his drunken slumbers, lest I should avenge my cruel wrongs."

"He stole my lover away, he wrecked and ruined my life, changed a happy girl to a bitter woman, and yet you tell me to be faithful. To-night I am mad, to-night I fling back all his insults, his blows in his face, I scorn to bear his name longer, or to remember the vows I made. I am absolved of them."

"Oh, no, no! and at the eleventh hour help will come; oh, dear mistress, be patient yet awhile longer."

"Patient! That is beyond me now. Stand back and let me pass."

"No; I will arouse my parents; you shall not go to dishonour!"

"Have pity, Phyllis; do not shame me before them. Loose me—let me go. Captain Heatherleigh is waiting for me even now."

But I held her fast, knowing that though she was stronger than I, she would never use violence; and as I wept and prayed, I heard the clatter of hoofs, the rattle of wheels along the road, and drew her farther into the shadows.

"It is a runaway," I whispered, and waited in fear for what would happen next. Soon there came the glare of lamps, and my lady shrieked out wildly, for by their light she saw Captain Heatherleigh's set white face.

In a moment she had wrenched herself free, and run to the gate just as the horse fell, tossing Captain Heatherleigh high over his head, and shattering the dog cart to atoms.

The animal was up and away in a moment, the man lay dreadfully still, and my lady was crouched beside him moaning in an awful way.

Some one crossed the road to me; it was Stephen, who had been waiting about to give help if help were needed.

"Get her in," he said, hoarsely. "I believe he is dead!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SHE resisted all our efforts to move her, until I said,—

"Dear mistress, come away; he will need all your care, and Stephen cannot fetch a doctor until he has brought him in. Come, and let us call father."

She rose then, but she was so suddenly weak that she could not walk without my support, but in some way I got her into the lodge. Father was up already, the noise having awakened him, and came hurrying down.

"Hullo, Phyl, what be oop!" he cried, "and my laddy too!"

I drew him aside, and told him an accident had occurred to Captain Heatherleigh just outside the gate, and Stephen needed his assistance;

then I hurried about making things ready, and presently we heard the slow, staggering steps of those who bore a burden, and I flung open the door.

They carried him to my lady's own room, and laid him on the bed, then Stephen went away for Dr. Lucas, and mother was with the wounded man. My lady sat with her face hidden, and shivering as with cold; only once she spoke.

"Does he breathe?"

"Yes, my lady, and while there is life there is hope."

"You told me help would come at the eleventh hour," she said, with a bitter laugh, and then was silent.

He did not speak again until Dr. Lucas had made a careful examination of his patient; but when he came downstairs, she rose and confronted him with pleading agonised eyes.

"Tell me the truth," and he, knowing her sad story, answered pitifully,

"My dear lady, I dare not deceive you. He cannot live more than twenty-four hours! I hardly think he will last so long."

She threw out her hands wildly, but recovering herself almost in a moment, questioned,—

"Is he conscious? May I go to him?"

"He is quite conscious, and has asked for you," and she went slowly up to him, and they two were alone until the day dawned. Then my lady asked for me, and as I entered the quiet room I could scarcely control my sob—so changed was Captain Hetherleigh, so ahen the poor face upon the pillows, that I knew the doctor had spoken only too truly. He must have been suffering awful pain, although he smiled up at me, and motioned me to his side.

"You are a good girl, Phyllis, and have served your lady well. You will have your reward," but my lady said nothing, only sat with her deep, dark eyes bent upon his face, with such love and such anguish that I could not bear to look at her. "I can thank Heaven now," went on the feeble voice, "that I was arrested in my downward course. I can see now, Judith, that it was not happiness I would have taken you to, but absolute and hopeless misery and shame. Dear one, forgive, forgive!"

Her whole form was shaken with suppressed sobs as she said,—

"I was more to blame than you. Grey, oh, Grey! my darling, do not speak of these things now. Oh, my heart! oh, my heart! I shall not live to bear this anguish long."

"Pray for me," he pleaded, but she answered,—

"I cannot pray," and turned to me.

"I don't know what I said, I was carried out of myself, but I remember when I lifted my head, I saw a look of peace on my lady's face that had not been there for very long, and the Captain's smile was good to see."

"I know now," he whispered, "there is forgiveness for sinners such as I, even at the eleventh hour."

Later on the clergyman came and then a lawyer who was closeted a long time with the Captain; and many of the gentry came to the house inquiring for him. But towards the close of the afternoon he was left in peace and once again I was sent for.

"Stay with your mistress," he gasped, "she will need your support soon—it is nearly over—nearly over now."

So I sat down in a far corner of the room, waiting with sinking heart for the end that was not very long coming.

When the sun was going down the last great change drew near, and my lady sank on her knees beside the bed, holding one cold hand in hers.

"You will not go back to him!" he said, faintly, "I am afraid for you."

A strong shudder ran through her frame.

"I shall not go back!"

"You will find some quiet home, where, at least, you may be content. I have provided for you, Judith. Ah, love! love! if we had but known! If we had trusted more fully in the past. We were happy then—too happy—and now, I thank Heaven that at the very last you will be with me!"

"I shall not stay long behind," she answered, quite calmly, now. "I am a broken woman—broken and old before my time."

"Sweetheart, sweetheart! In this last hour I may have and hold you mine without sin. Lay your lips to mine once, in blessing. How far away you seem! Judith, is this death?"

She bowed her head.

"It is not hard—only that—I leave you! Judith, do not fret!"

She lifted her face to his.

"I have no tears now, my darling!"

"Phyllis will take care of you," and she answered,—

"Yes, dear Phyllis will care for me to the end."

And a great stillness fell upon us, broken only by those gasping breaths which each moment grew fainter and slower.

The face upon the pillows was grey and damp with the death-dew now, the dark eyes were fast glazing. I thought he was unconscious; but when my lady bent over him, breathing his name lovingly, yearningly, he whispered back,—

"Yes, Judith! yes, my dear girl—my dear girl!" and put out his hand, blindly.

She clasped it in her own, but she shed no tear, and her face wore a look of peace, I did not then understand.

The Captain moved ever so slightly, lips and eyelids quivered, then grew still, and, rising, I ran to my lady.

"Come away!" I begged, "come away, dearest mistress; don't you see?"

"Gone!" she said, in a strange, low voice. "Gone!" and dropped on her knees once more.

I dared not intrude upon her sorrow, but went out quietly, closing the door behind me, and for a long time we waited for her coming, until, growing anxious, mother went upstairs, and, suddenly, through the house there rang a dreadful scream.

Frightened as I was I ran up to that room, and saw mother standing wild-eyed and white, pointing to my lady.

"Oh, look! look! she is dead!"

I could not—would not believe it. My mistress, my beautiful mistress gone away for ever. I lifted her heavy head, and gazed into her white, still, peaceful face, and then I sobbed out,—

"Heaven has been good to her!" and kissed the poor blue lips.

Doctors said it was heart disease; but we simple folk called it by another name, and spoke of her in hushed voices.

(Continued on page 304.)

THE HAUNTED OAK.

"PRAY, why are you so bare, so bare,
O bough of the old oak-tree;
And why, when I go through the shade you
throw,

Runs a shudder over me!"

"My leaves were green as the best, I trow,
And sap ran free in my veins,
But I saw in the moonlight dim and weird
A guiltless victim's pains.

"I bent me down to hear his sigh;
I shook with his gurgling moan;
And I trembled sore when they rode away
And left him here alone.

"They'd charged him with the old, old crime,
And set him fast in jail;
Oh, why does the dog howl all night long,
And why does the night wind wail!"

"I feel the rope against my bark,
And the weight of him in my grail,
I feel in the throes of his final woe
The touch of my own last pain.

"And nevermore shall leaves come forth
On a bough that bears the ban.
I am burned with dread, I am dried and dead,
From the curse of a guiltless man."

PAUL DUNBAR, in the Century.

FLOWER OF FATE.

—10—

CHAPTER XVII.

At last Moretown Hall was pronounced satisfactory by its most exigent owner. Sir Keith had been absent so long from his home that it required a considerable amount of renovation to make the large building cosy as well as magnificent.

The day for the marriage was drawing nigh, the bells that would ring for the commencement of another year would ring also for the commencement of Keith Moretown's new life.

His handsome, happy face was a sore sight to Rex Darnley, and to one other also—his fiancée's brother, Lord Drummoor.

The latter had spoken out candidly to his cousin.

"On my honour, R-x," he had said, "I feel like some treacherous rogue, whenever I look at Moretown; and yet I have not the courage to speak out and give him just an inkling that Anice is not quite the angel of goodness he imagined. Ah! Rex," the young man had added, with a sigh, "it goes against the grain to speak so of one's sister; I had hoped that this engagement at least was genuine—that her heart had been touched at last; but I find I was mistaken. Instead of acting for good it seems to have made Anice more inconsiderate, worldly, and selfish than she was before, if that is possible."

R-x's answer had been to grasp his cousin's hand.

"You can acquit yourself of any wrong, Drummoor; you have done all that mortal man could do; and believe me, old fellow, speaking to Moretown, difficult and delicate as it would be, would produce no effect except anger on his part; he is too deeply infatuated to be roused, except by Anice herself, and that unfortunately will come soon."

Rex never found an opportunity to speak to Lady Anice again about the Comtesse de Ganyani; but as he never heard her name mentioned, he concluded that she had spoken to Keith, and that all had been explained to his satisfaction.

He mingled much with the busy preparations for the wedding—it took him out of himself; for, since his parting with Vera, he had suffered an agony of regretful longing and despairing love. He seemed changed to many, even Lady Anice could not fail to observe his quiet mien and almost sad expression.

"Can he be in love?" she asked herself; then a smiler disfigured her pretty mouth. "In love! Bah!—an idle like Rex!"

It pleased her to arrive at this conclusion, for against herself she was more piqued than she would have cared to confess at his non-appreciation of her dainty beauty and open dislike for herself.

He had seen Tom Watson, who was, as Mr. Mason had prophesied, contrite to a degree, and who had listened to all his advice and promised to abide by it. One thing Rex urged most strongly—the wisdom and just obligation for Watson to inform his mother and sister of his marriage. He felt that this might be of great comfort to Vera, and he promised to speak on the same subject to Mr. Mason and make everything smooth.

He had a more difficult task than he imagined, as Tom's employer, being a straightforward, honest man, was really incensed at his secretary's want of truth. Indeed, but for Rex's intercession, he would have written at once to Tom and asked him to resign his appointment.

"Ah me! I fear for your future, my darling!" Rex thought, as he left the office; "but as long as life is given me I will guard you as best I can. There is one thing, the man loves you—weak, unprincipled as I am afraid he is, he loves you—how could he do otherwise? There may be weariness of spirit, disappointment, perhaps even disgrace, but there will be no brutality. You are freed from that wretch Dr. Mortimer, and that is well, even at the cost of our love!"

Vera traced his influence in her young husband.

Though they had been married only a few short weeks, they had been long enough for her to gauge Tom's character to its utmost depths. She felt pity for his terrible instability, his moral weakness; she was touched by his devotion to herself; although, even in that, she recoiled from his grovelling love, that had so little manliness in it; but she could not crush the contempt that would spring in her heart as she learnt how easily he lied, and how prevarication seemed no shame, how his nature abhorred work, and how he turned by inclination out of the straight path, being indeed little better than a vane, blown to and fro by the last impression his mind received!

She kept this to herself, and smiled faintly when Amy and Mrs. Watson came to London and launched out into praise of their darling. Amy, it was true, did not say much, but the mother was never tired of dwelling on the subject. Both women welcomed the girl with warmth and tenderness that was refreshing to Vera's heart—grown weary so long for want of it, and in return she gave them glimpses of the sweet, affectionate nature which all the clouds of sorrow could not tarnish.

"I will not say that it did not surprise me, dear," Mrs. Watson murmured, as she held Vera's hand and leaned back, as her handsome, weak son did, lifting her pretty faded eyes to the girl's face; "but I am glad now; you are a good, a sweet girl, Vera; I grew to love you in that short time, and I am delighted my boy has saved you from that wicked man, your father—poor young creature!"

Vera's answer was a kiss.

Amy, glancing at her pale, lovely face, asked gently,—

"Do you hear anything of him, Vera?"

Vera shuddered.

"The last I heard was from Maggie. It seems that my—that he has gone to America, so she was told, thinking I had gone there. I cannot say whether this is true."

"Never mind," observed Mrs. Watson, "England or America, he can't have you again, Vera; you have some one to protect you, and who could do that so well as our darling?"

To this Vera made no verbal reply; she only smiled, though in her heart she knew what little store she was already setting on that protectorship in aught but its name. She could always use that weapon in the event of her father claiming her.

After that brief scene with Rex, Vera woke to the necessity of taking up some occupation, turning her brain and mind to some channel outside her life. She dared not let herself think of Rex; it was a torture to know of his love, and realise it could never be hers, so with an eagerness that was almost feverish she returned to her studies, and determined to give all her spare moments to the hard work that lay before her, as an actress of legitimate and Shakespearian parts.

Mrs. Watson was little sorry, not to say vexed, at the girl's fixed resolve to continue on the stage.

"As Tom's wife, my dear," she tried to remonstrate feebly, "do you think it wise? Will Mr. Mason like it? You must consider everything well; besides, Vera, I thought you hated the life!"

"I hated it as I lived it when you first met me, it is true," Vera replied, quietly; "but I must work, and there is no other occupation open to me. I shall speak to Mr. Mason before I do anything definitely."

Tom, too, demurred a little, but Vera took no notice of his objection, which indeed, was short-lived, when Tom began to think of the prospective golden harvest likely to accrue from his wife's theatrical career.

With Amy, Vera was strangely silent, but the girls seemed drawn even closer together by reason of that very silence. No one knew better than Amy the truth about her brother; and though she loved him she could not shut her eyes to the fact that Vera's future would probably be darkened by sorrow, if not by shame.

After awhile Amy and her mother went back to Bentley, and then Vera's everyday life began. She neglected no wifely duty, but, despite that, she could not crush the contempt that was

growing so slowly and surely in her heart for her husband.

When she had read and thought out several parts she went to Mr. Robinson of the Theatre, reminded him of his promise, was received most cordially, and in very short time found herself studying with one of the first elocutionists of the day, while her *début* was already an affair of consideration. She also went to Mr. Mason, and in her sweet, frank manner put everything clearly to him, stating her plans quietly and clearly.

Mr. Mason, annoyed and vexed by his secretary's quibbling-like ways, was disposed at first to be churl and cross, but Vera's beauty and sweetness won its way.

"Well," he said, as they parted, "it will make no difference with your husband. I am sorry you are going to adopt the life, Mrs. Watson. It is a hard one, and not the best one in the world for one so young and lovely as you are; but there—that is your business. I am sure you have some good motive, and that is a thing one does not look for in Tom Watson. Why, bless my soul! with such a wife as you the boy should be as straight as a die."

Vera smiled, and went away. The smile faded as she walked along in the cold wind back to her home. She thought of Rex as she walked. It was not often she permitted herself to do so, but something brought him forcibly to her mind.

"I wonder if I shall ever see him again," was the weary cry of her heart. "Oh! to clasp his hand, to hear his voice! My life is so empty, so hard, so lonely!"

And even as she thought this she met him.

He was in a hansom whirling past, and she felt her heart leap with a sudden emotion that almost made her faint. She moved on involuntarily; she saw nothing but a mist before her eyes, and then someone was beside her, and she was standing still, her hand clasped in Rex Darnley's.

"How pale you are!" was his greeting, spoken in the hard, cold fashion which used to jar on her so terribly, but which she knew now came from concentration. "Are you well?"

"Quite, quite well," she murmured, drawing her hand from his. "And you?"

Rex shrugged his shoulders.

"I am always well. Come into the Park for one instant; I want to speak to you."

They were close to the Marble Arch, and, making a sign to his cab to wait, Rex turned with the girl into the deserted flowerless Park.

They walked, without speaking, to a seat. No one was near, the day was not inviting, and winter had shorn the outside world of all its beauty.

Vera sank on to the seat, and Rex sat beside her, occupying himself at first with turning over the loose gravel with his stick.

"Is this true?" he asked at last, pulling his hat low over his brow and resolutely looking away from the tremulous, lovely face beside him.

Vera seemed to guess his meaning.

"That I am going back to the stage? Yes," she answered.

"Is it wise?"

She made a gesture with her hands, and then said in a low voice,—

"I must."

Rex hit a pebble away violently.

"I fail to see that," he declared in tones that were strangely angry; "your husband should not allow it."

"My husband!" Against herself the contempt would out.

"It is he who should work, not you," Rex went on with that pertinaciously usual to him when he was agitated.

"I am not afraid of work," Vera said dreamily; "I welcome it."

There was silence between them till he broke it.

"Are—are you very unhappy?" he asked.

He turned, and their eyes met.

"If I do not work I shall go mad," the girl answered, and she rose as she spoke.

Rex checked himself with an effort. How he longed at that instant to snatch her two small hands and draw her to his breast—a haven of peace and love for ever! But it must not be. Was it not her purity, her goodness, that was more to him than aught else?

"Forgive me for asking such a question," he said, hurriedly. "Perhaps you are right to take up some work, only, for Heaven's sake, Vera, be careful of yourself; remember the life you enter—remember!"

She stopped him with a smile so sad it went to his heart.

"What can happen to me, dear, when I love you?"

He took her hand and carried it to his lips; he could not speak, and they went slowly back to the gate.

"I am afraid I have hindered you," Vera said, trying to get on to other topics. "Were you in a hurry?"

"I was only going to my rooms. I have just come from Daly House in—ahire, having been there for my cousin's wedding with Keith Moretown."

Vera looked interested.

"That handsome, nice man who came to the performance! Strange, I seemed to have seen him before, and yet that was impossible!"

Rex turned to her.

"Can you remember nothing of your childhood?"

Vera shook her head.

"I can only remember mother—my dear, sweet, angel mother. Ah! what a life of misery she led!"

Rex was silent. He longed to tell her that a rigid search was being made as to her birth and childhood, but refrained. He would not raise hopes that might be utterly false. Time enough to speak of them when something definite was brought to light. As yet the detectives had no clue to De Mortimer's whereabouts, though America was supposed to be the spot, and as he alone could lift the veil, the progress made was slight.

"We must part here," Rex said, as they approached the gate. "Write to me if you should want any friend's help, and you know I will come."

"I will," Vera said.

She put her hand into his, and at that moment a carriage rolled into the Park. Two ladies were seated in it, both dark and handsome, and their eyes were fixed on the two standing together.

A smile and gracious bow from both caused Rex to lift his hat, which he did with an ill grace.

"What a handsome, cruel face!" Vera said, almost involuntarily, "and like—"

She stopped, and Rex's heart throbbed.

It was the Countess de Ganyan and her daughter who had passed—the stepmother who had worked so much misery in Keith Moretown's early life. Vera had gazed at her as if some strange instinct or memory returned to her as she gazed. To him her sudden hesitation was another link in the chain of evidence that was needed to give her back to her proper sphere and home.

They said farewell quietly, and he stood watching the slender, graceful figure disappear before he stepped into his cab.

"If it but comes right," he murmured, as he drove on, "I can see her taken from the life of drudgery and hardship, surrounded by luxury and affection. Yet how quiet! how brave! how true she is! 'What could happen to me, dear, when I love you!' Vera, my darling! Heaven grant my love may be the guardian of your existence. Fate may be cruel, but, come what will, our love can never die!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE year was growing out of its first youth, when Sir Keith and Lady Alice Moretown returned from their long honeymoon abroad. London was very full, Parliament had met early and, despite the cold, uncongenial weather, the

streets were filled with smart carriages and pedestrians.

Gaiety was almost at as great a height as in the season, and in the theatrical world no little excitement was caused by the announcement that Mr. Robinson of the Tœppla had engaged the Lyric Theatre for the debut of Miss Lorraine, a new actress of whom report spoke highly.

Vera had wisely changed her name. De Mortimer's was not held in the highest esteem, and Watson was impossible, so she chose Lorraine as being pretty and new. She had worked very hard, and found her studies at once a solace and delight; it was very different to the rough, vulgar, degrading life she had led in the operatic travelling company. There was poetry, artistic conception twined in with the parts with which she meant to identify herself, and warmly applauded and praised by her manager and master, she hoped for a success.

The week before her appearance Tom Watson received an intimation from Mr. Mason that his services would be required no longer. He kept this from Vera, partly from shame and partly from that cunning that goes with weakness. He knew, and was peevishly annoyed at the fact, that any sympathy and liking Vera might have had for him he had banished long ago; and instead of her industry proving infectious, he hailed it as a probable solution to the problem of how they were to live in the future. Had Vera loved her young husband things might perhaps have been different. But as he felt her gradually rising above him, and shaming him by her steadfast womanly strength and courage, he devoted himself with sullen perversity to his amusements, which, unfortunately for him, were, for the most part, gambling ones.

Vera had a hard time, rehearsing every day, studying every night, writing letters to Amy and her mother, and waiting hour after hour for Tom to come home and let her go to rest. For, with her customary selfishness, Vera had agreed to sit up for her husband and let the landlady retire to her well-earned repose.

There was a feverishness and excitement about Tom that oppressed her, not knowing the cause, and her heart grew faint as a vision of the future came with its loneliness and misery. Many and many a time the longing came to her to speak openly to her husband—to say that it had been a great, a terrible mistake—to suggest that they should part and live their own lives; but she always crushed it. She had vowed herself to this man, and duty must be done. Besides, she knew that to a certain extent she held some influence over him, and that it was for his good; and, knowing this, she felt she must not leave him, be her life harder and harder each day.

After that chance meeting with Rex, she had become unconsciously comforted. The fact that this strong, true, brave man loved her was a secret joy which even the sorrow of lasting separation could not dim. Her father and his brutality had passed from her mind, she was safe from his degrading influence; and weak and contemptible as Tom Watson was, he was always refined, and a gentleman. The day of her debut came.

Vera would never forget it. She had spent the preceding night in a lonely vigil waiting with anxiety and dread for her husband, who never came home. As dawn was creeping slowly over the sky she flung herself down on the hard couch, and slept a deep, weary troubled sleep, till the entrance of the landlady roused her. Her last rehearsal was at eleven, and as the moments passed she knew not what to do, for Tom never came.

She left the house sick with nervousness, and the apprehension that still more sorrow was at hand, though she brought all her natural courage to bear on the situation, and argue the possible reasons for Tom's absence. It was a position sufficient to try the stoutest woman's heart; now much more so when a day of suspense, excitement, and mental work lay before her such as rarely comes in a life-time. Vera had not a single friend of whom she could ask sympathy on this day. Maggie and her husband were in the country, and would return only just in time to see the performance. Rex Darnley she

knew nothing of, and Tom, who should have comforted and assisted her, was only adding to her mental care by his selfishness or carelessness.

Had she received much attention at the theatre, in all probability she would have broken down; but Mr. Robinson was a wise man; he saw the agitation and nervousness on her face, and addressed her throughout the day in the courtest way possible, thereby bracing Vera up to the best of her ability.

A very large and fashionable audience was assembled in the Lyric when the orchestra commenced the overture before the curtain rose, and chief among them was Lady Anice Moretown, her handsome husband, and a host of smart men flitting in and out of her box.

Keith Moretown's face had already lost its radiant youthfulness; it was not unhappy, but the supreme content that had shone in his eyes during his brief betrothal was gone, and a steady thoughtfulness was reflected instead.

"Poor Keith! already changed," murmured Rex Darnley to himself, glancing up from his stall to the box where Lady Anice's jewelled prettiness attracted much attention; "it is only what I feared. Well, if that last clue turns up I may be instrumental in giving him a sister whose sweetness surely must console him for his wife's heartlessness."

Such a thought was natural to Rex, for Vera was to him the sweetest of all women; but to Keith Moretown the shattering of his love-dream would be a lasting blow, which no sister's hand, however tender, could touch or heal.

"Why, there is Rex! Keith, go and fetch him. I want to speak to him."

And Lady Anice touched her husband imperiously with her jewelled fan. She did not particularly care to see Rex, but she desired the absence of her husband for two or three minutes.

Sir Keith rose at once.

"R-x—where? ah! I see. I am glad, dear old fellow. Prince, will you excuse me?"

The Prince de Boules, a tall, remarkable rather than handsome man, who had entered the box a few minutes before, bowed gracefully.

As Sir Keith disappeared the Prince dropped into a chair close to Lady Anice's dainty white robes.

"At last I have one instant. I was in despair," he murmured, fastening his dark, sad eyes on the piquante face.

"Nonsense!" Lady Anice laughed, a little constrainedly. "Where is the Countess, and what about that ball?"

The Prince shrugged his shoulders.

"The Countess is mad about that ball; she declares it will be the success of the season. You are coming?"

Lady Anice frowned.

"I mean to come."

"And Sir Keith?" queried the other.

"Oh! Keith is a fool. It seems he has a grudge against the Countess—at least, he never said so, but he refuses to visit her, and—"

"And wishes you to follow his footsteps, ah!" finished the Prince. "Well, I don't know why you should object, *ma belle*."

Ma belle frowned.

"I will not be dictated to by anyone," she declared. "Now go. Come back and talk to me between the acts."

"It will be night till then," was the soft, impassioned whisper, as the Prince obediently withdrew just as Sir Keith and Rex came in.

"Where did you pick up that fellow?" asked the latter, in his usual curt way, as he exchanged greetings with his cousin.

"What fellow?" drawled Lady Anice, languidly. "Oh! the Prince de Boules; we met him in Florence; he is rather amusing."

"Is he!—looks like a bandit," Rex said, quietly, taking in the fair, flushed cheek carefully; "a dangerous one too!"

"I confess," Sir Keith laughed, easily, "he has something of that air; but he is not a bad fellow, Rex."

"Hum! I have my doubts on that score," thought Rex.

"Why, there is that horrid Mrs. Motte!" exclaimed Lady Anice, as Maggie and her husband entered their box opposite; "what on earth does she dress her like that for! she looks scarcely decent."

Rex glanced from Mrs. Motte's black satin dress, which permitted a very little of the white shoulders to be seen, to Lady Anice's most décolleté bodice.

"Glass houses, Anice," he observed, dryly. "You know the proverb."

Lady Anice flushed; she always felt at a disadvantage with her cousin, and longed to implant some pain in his heart, or shake his cool, quiet manner.

The curtain rose on the first act of *Romeo and Juliet*. The crowd of Montagues and Capulets surged and squabbled, the love-sick Romeo poured out his passion for Rosaline, and Rex felt an insane hatred and jealousy for the handsome young actor who a few moments hence would be standing side by side with his one true love.

He scarcely followed the text, his heart was throbbing wildly, his ears hungering for the first sound of her voice.

It came at last, those low, sweet, clear tones.

"How now! who calls!" and from the curtains came forth a slender, graceful girl, with hair unbound, that fell like a golden mantle to her knees.

There was a momentary hush of surprise at the new Juliet's beauty; then surprise and courtesy melted into a hearty burst of welcome that echoed again.

Rex sat motionless through that scene. He saw nothing but the pure, sweet face, with eyes of deepest, rarest blue. She was his—his very own! Had she not said it?

He turned as the curtain fell for the next scene, and caught Lady Anice's eye. She was mortified beyond words to discover in the new actress the girl Vera she had so much disliked; but with her mortification came the delight that at last she had fathomed Rex's secret. She had half guessed it that night when the news of Vera's disappearance had come; but now she was sure.

"Very amateurish!" she summed up.

But to this neither her husband nor Rex replied. Sir Keith was thinking only of Vera, and wondering in a strange, excited way if Rex's idea could be true, and that this girl could be the lost Maggie he had loved—the legacy of that dead angel mother. If it were really so, how much happiness lay before him! He would take her from her life of drudgery—and perhaps poverty—enshrine her in the home she had been born in and from which she had been so strangely swept away.

The curtain fell on the first act. It shut out the figure of Juliet standing in the moonlit ball-room, gasping after the fast-vanishing Romeo, an agony of dawning love and sorrow in her face, foreshadowing the tragic tale to come.

There was no mistake about the success; the applause rang again and again, and three times Vera was led before the curtain to gratify the audience.

Lady Anice fanned herself leisurely. It was odious to her to hear the adulation poured out on this girl. She hated Vera for her youth, beauty, and talent, but above all because she had touched that strange, cold heart of Rex Darnley, which no wiles of Keith Moretown's pretty wife could effect. Not that Anice would ever have loved her cousin. No; but because it was hurtful to her vanity, and consequently not to be forgiven.

"There is Lord Vivian talking to that creature!" she observed, with an air of disdain.

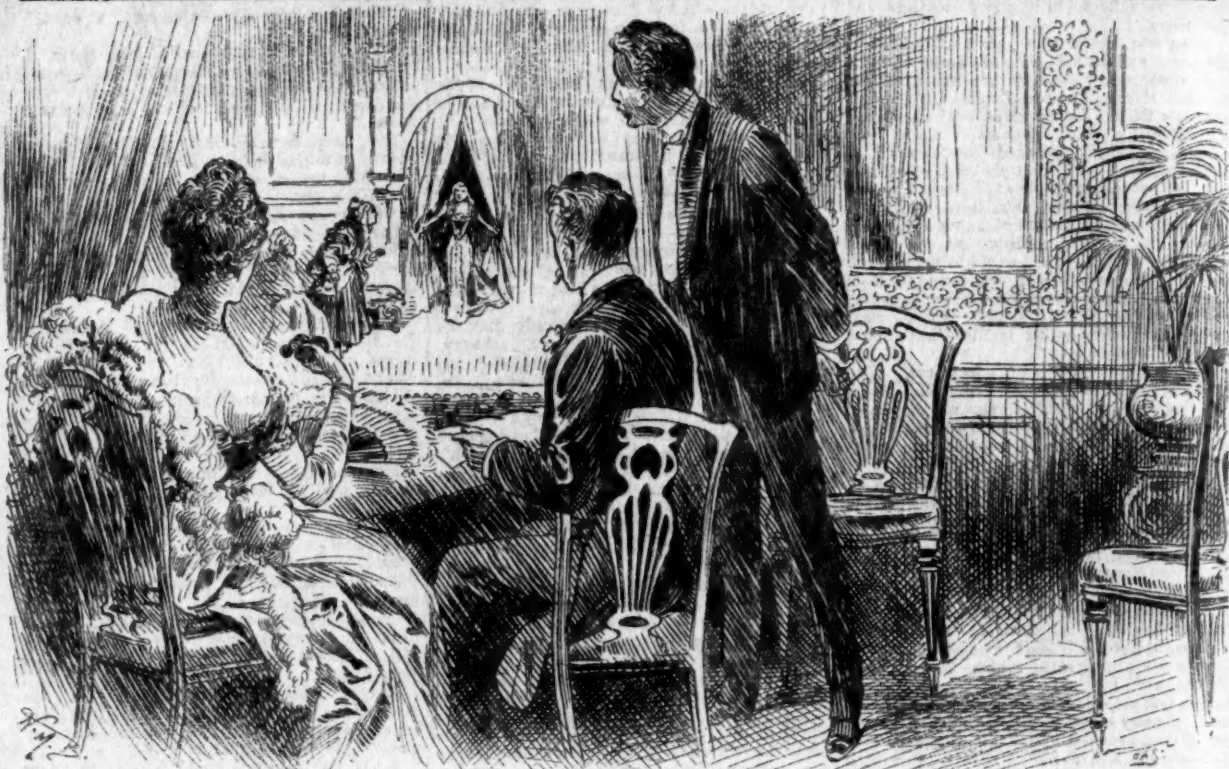
Rex glanced across to Maggie's box, and there sure enough was his friend.

"When did Edie come back, I wonder!" he murmured, almost involuntarily.

Lady Anice laughed.

"I am so don't know the last scandal," Rex. Lord Vivian, I believe, has been back some time. Of course he is here to-night!"

"Why of course!" Rex asked, coldly.



THERE WAS A MOMENTARY HUSH OF SURPRISE AT THE NEW JULIET'S BEAUTY.

"Oh! because everybody knows Miss Lorraine, as she calls herself now, is under his protection."

Rex felt the blood rush to his face, and his hand closed; but he was wise. He saw at once this was but an intentional insult to Vera.

"How like a woman, Ance!" he said, in his most provoking way. "Pray be careful. If scandal tells such tales who shall escape!"

He went out, following Sir Keith, who had heard nothing; and immediately the Prince de Boules made his way to Lady Ance's side, marvelling not a little at the evident bad temper of the dainty beauty who deigned to accept his fulsome admiration.

Rex and Sir Keith sauntered round the corridor, and came upon Lord Vivian.

The heartiest welcome followed, and then the Earl, who looked well and very bronzed, explained that Mrs. Motte had sent him on an errand.

"She wishes me to go round to the stage-door, and try to send, if not give, this locket to Miss Lorraine. It was her mother's, and Mrs. Motte thinks she might probably like to wear it some time to-night."

"I can lead the way. Will you come, too, Keith?" Rex asked, feeling glad to see the Earl once again, and longing to meet Vera, and whisper his word of congratulation. But Sir Keith put out his hand instead.

"Will you let me look at that locket, Vivian?" he said, hurriedly.

The Earl gave him the slender gold chain and ornament.

Without a word Keith Moretown opened a snap, and disclosed a picture, faded and old, yet still clearly discernible.

"Does this belong to Miss Lorraine? Are you quite sure?" he asked, in a voice that was strained with emotion.

"I know it does," Rex answered. "She left it for Mrs. Motte the evening of her flight. Why do you ask, Keith?"

Sir Keith turned; there were tears in his eyes.

"Rex, old fellow, we have found the last clue. This was my mother's locket, and this is her picture."

"Be brave!" whispered Mr. Robinson in Vera's ear as she went towards the tier in the tomb for the last act. "It has been a veritable triumph. Ah! I knew I was right. Your fortune is made, my child."

"Wait!" she murmured, her every nerve thrilling with the strain of the night's work. "All is not over yet."

But Mr. Robinson shook his head. He was not afraid, and his belief was well-founded, for when the curtain rolled slowly down on the two young forms lying dead, a perfect shout arose for Vera that sounded like a hurricane. With limbs that trembled beneath her she faced the mass of people, dimly conscious of the waving handkerchiefs, the cheers, and the praise.

They led her back to the stage, and she sank exhausted into a chair; while from every corner flocked carpenters and suppers to swell the hymn of triumph.

Suddenly, while her brain was reeling, as it were, beneath the excitement, some one came behind her chair.

"Mrs. Watson," said a voice, and a letter was handed to her.

She took it mechanically, and was about to open it when she saw three faces draw near, and foremost among them Rex. She smiled at him faintly, and then tore open the note.

It was curt, and the few words seemed to daze her.

"St. George's Hospital."

"MADAM.—It is our duty to inform you that a man, giving the name of Tom Watson, and the address of 7, Culworth-terrace, died here this morning. We shall be glad to receive any communication.—We are, Madam, "Y. V."

Rex saw her face grow ghastly pale. Without a second thought he was beside her.

"Vera, good heavens! what is it!"

"Read," she said, hoarsely; and then her strength failed. She swayed forward, and fell senseless in his arms, ignorant for a time that the barrier was removed from her love, that a brother knelt distractedly beside her, that happiness might dawn again!

(To be continued.)

A PETRIFIED forest, covering an area of 100 square miles, has existed for centuries in Arizona. Thousands and thousands of petrified logs strew the ground, and represent beautiful shades of pink, purple, red, grey, blue, and yellow. One of the stone-trees spans a gulf forty feet wide.

HOLLY, originally called holy, from its being used in holy places, owes its importance in the Christmas festivities to paganism. The Romans dedicated the holly to Saturn, whose festival was held in December; and the early Christians, to screen themselves from persecution, decked their houses with its branches during their own celebration of the Nativity.

ON Christmas Eve, too, a couple of figures in disguise may frequently be seen making their round among the houses of a selected neighbourhood, sometimes only among the different flats of one house. They are Knecht Ruprecht and Father Christmas. At the door of the house a great bag of apples, &c., is handed to Knecht Ruprecht. Then he enters and inquires after the conduct of the children, and, if the parents answer favourably, Father Christmas, who wears a white dress and a pink or gilt belt, orders the contents of the bag to be emptied on the floor, and, while the attention of the children is centred in the scramble, the two figures disappear to perform a similar office at other houses.



MRS. RAYMOND INTRODUCED HIM TO THE WAXWORK SUBSTITUTE FOR HER MISTRESS.

VERNON'S DESTINY.

-10-

CHAPTER XVII.

MEG CHARTERIS would have been bitterly offended had anyone called her superstitious, and yet, at the sound of that awful wailing cry her grasp on Lena's hand involuntarily tightened, and her footsteps came to an abrupt stop.

"I can't go on," she said, feebly. "Lena, I daren't!"

But Isola Merton's sister had her own share of courage, and other people's too. In strength and force Lit might fall often; in that quality best described as pluck, never.

"You must come," she returned calmly. "Recollect you have given your promise."

But her own fingers were cold, and Meg could hear her breath come and go as they went onwards.

Miss Charteris had one advantage over Lit—she knew the room, had been in it often, and recalled the exact position of the furniture. Nothing had been changed.

Entering from the dressing-room you came at once upon two French windows opening to a balcony. Facing these was a bed; a sofa ran at its foot, a few chairs, and a mahogany wardrobe—that was all. Mirror and toilet appliances were all in the dressing-room.

There was, as Meg had said before, something bare and desolate about the apartment. Its furniture, of course, was good and solid; but there were none of the little necessities women love, and it had the whole "utility" air which mostly distinguishes a man's room from a lady's.

To think that, with the choice of such splendours as were to be found at the Hall, it should have been allotted to the young wife was incredible.

"Sit down," said Lena, and her voice, though faint, had a ring of command. "I am going to strike a light."

Meg sank on to the first chair she came to. Lena lighted a candle.

"Look here!"

Thus entreated Miss Charteris walked to the window, and Lit pointed to something suspended above the balcony, and moving to and fro. It was between a mop, a stick, and a broom; but the cleverness of the device consisted in its being hung from the balcony resting in such a position that each unusually high gust of wind would cause it to sweep over the strings of a rough kind of Jew's harp.

Lit detected this in an instant, and held Meg forcibly at her side until, by the light of their flickering candle, they distinctly saw the seeming mop come into contact with the strings of the harp, when the sound which had so terrified them was distinctly heard.

"There is nothing to fear," said Lena, sadly.

"It is a wicked device of that man's to scare people away from this room lest they should try to liberate his poor wife. Oh! Meg, I felt awfully frightened! Didn't you?"

"Awfully!" confessed Meg, with chattering teeth. "I never did believe in ghosts; but I felt inclined to to-night."

"And now we will go to Nell."

But there was no one in the bed. Lit drew the curtains aside and peeped; then Meg touched her hand.

"She is on the sofa."

Something very still and motionless was indeed stretched upon the couch. At first sight it had seemed nothing but a heap of wraps.

Lena advanced towards the sofa, shading her candle with one hand. A feminine figure lay there, dressed in the extreme of fashion, with pink and white cheeks, most elegant eyebrows and lashes, very smiling lips and pearly teeth.

Meg's first impression was that the face looked very vacant, her next that the dress must be unusually long, since, though the lady was reclining on her back, there was no trace of a foot visible.

Was she asleep? Was it possible that Mrs. Denzil took her repose with those glassy eyes

open in a deliberate stare, and an insane slumber on her lips?

Meg had not settled this question when she was horrified by her sister-in-law's conduct.

Lena calmly sat down on the sofa, letting her whole weight rest without scruple on the exact spot where Mrs. Denzil's feet might be supposed to rest, and burst into a fit of almost hysterical laughter.

"Lena!"

"I can't help it. Oh, Meg! I have thought of many wonderful things, but the wildest theory I ever found was not so extraordinary as this, and she went off into another burst of laughter."

Meg felt really angry.

"She will wake up in a minute," speaking in a very low tone, and signifying by a glance at the slumbering lady who was meant by the pronoun. "Really, Lit, I feel ashamed of you. What will Mrs. Denzil think of you for laughing at her so rudely?"

Lit grew grave.

"I am not laughing at Mrs. Denzil, and this lady will not think at all about my conduct. Oh! Meg, is it possible you don't see?"

"I see nothing," said Meg, in rather an injured tone; "and you are wasting precious time."

"Meg, I thought you would have guessed. This is a lay figure, just a waxwork dummy out of some milliner's shop. See!" and she turned up the elegant dress and disclosed a framework unmistakably artificial, with more than suggestions of wire. "Mrs. Denzil is only wax as far as her head and arms; the rest of her is of inferior substance. Here, I will convince you," and deliberately holding a lighted match over the fair pink and white face, she gave Meg such positive proof of her correctness as would have satisfied the most incredulous.

"Now we can go home."

"Shall we tell Raymond?"

"I think not. Meg, aren't you glad we came, and that all has ended well?"

It was not in the nature of Meg Charteris to

be ungenerous, or refuse praise where it was justly due.

"I am very glad we came. Oh, Lena, I feel thankful you thought of it. Nell must believe our opinion of Mr. Densill now."

"Yes."

Meg thought the "yes" a little short, but she knew Lena was tired, and did not worry her by questions. Indeed, she took the whole of the farewells to the old housekeeper on herself, and would not let her sister-in-law speak again until she had got safely back to Fir Cottage, and was leaning back in Lady Maude's own particular chair, sipping some wine Meg had promptly poured out.

"It is almost ten. Very soon Nell may be here now. Lit, you look so ill!"

"I am trying to think."

"Of what?"

"What is to be done next?"

Meg opened her eyes.

"I can't see there is anything more to be done. We have proof positive Mrs. Densill is not at the Hall. Nay, more, that she never has been there!"

"That is just it. Meg, Reginald Densill must be a worse man now than we thought him."

"Why?"

"He must have outraged his wife's feelings more than we know of to make her leave him."

"We don't know that she has."

"Do you suppose if there were any possible way of inducing her to come here with him he would have resorted to the expedient we have just discovered? He was a man of the world; he must have known the risk he ran of discovery."

"I don't see his object!"

"I think I do. He wanted to take his place as master of Charteris Hall. He wanted to be received as one of the county families. He could not succeed if he ignored his wife, since all his claim came from her. The only way was to represent Mrs. Densill as eccentric and unsociable. He now saw Nell as received as an intimate at our house. I suppose the rest would have been easy work comparatively!"

Meg looked bewildered.

"How clever you are, Lit. Then do you think papa and Nell really saw Helen in Devonshire?"

"No."

The word was spoken slowly and deliberately, almost as though wrong from Lena with positive pain. Meg, for once, was obtuse, and continued her questions.

"But that could not have been a dummy; she moved and spoke."

"I know!"

"And she seemed quite happy and satisfied with her choice then."

"Meg," said Lena, suddenly. "I suppose when your father came back he told you all about Mrs. Densill? I wish you would describe her to me just as he did to you."

"Have you never asked Nell?"

"Never! Until to-night I don't think I doubted really that it was Mrs. Densill."

"And you doubt now?"

"Only describe her."

"She couldn't have been a dummy—she moved and spoke. She was a pretty tony-looking creature, just like a wax doll. She had masses of flaxen hair, and eyes like a china shepherdess. Oh! Lit, my darling, what have I said to make you look like that!"

Lena Charteris had grown white as death. A faint moan escaped her.

"It must have been my sister."

"Lena!"

"You know that, long ago, before she was married, Isola was engaged to Reginald Densill. She treated him shamefully; but he was the only creature she ever loved."

"But she is Mrs. Merton!"

"Yes," said Lit, scornfully; "and Isola is too fond of money to do anything which would risk her position. She would never what people call 'go wrong,' not because her moral code is high, but because she values wealth and distinction too

much to do anything that would put her beyond society's pale."

"Yet you think she was in Devonshire as Mrs. Densill?"

"I think she betrayed Helen Charteris into marrying Reginald Densill. How she did it I have no idea; but of the fact I feel pretty sure."

"And then?"

"When poor Jim Merton found out she was not the angel he had thought her, and went abroad, I fancy she renewed her acquaintance with the Densills. Remember, Meg, this has no foundation but my own fancy. The young wife either grew jealous of her, or awoke to her husband's true character, and for one of these causes left him. Then comes the time when Densill so steadily refused all our attempts to see his wife. When poor Helen became lady of Charteris, and he could benefit nothing by the honour for lack of her signature, I can quite believe Isola would consent to take a journey into Devonshire and represent herself as the missing helms. Anyway, Meg, that description fits her to the life."

"And Nell?"

"Heaven help her!"

"But where would she be if your theory were correct? Why, Lena, she would have been a lonely wanderer for months!"

"My idea is that she left her husband on her wedding-day, or soon after. That is why I say Heaven help her! She had neither mother nor father, sister nor brother. Until I met Nell I found the world a pretty hard place even with all those appendages. What would she do without?"

"She may have had friends."

"No 'friends,' save those she met at my sister's; except, indeed, her schoolfellows, and they would be young girls, perhaps hardly out, with no influence or power."

"There is Nell!"

How they told him they never knew. They both talked at once as they poured their story into his ear.

He was little disposed to credit them; but when sober, grave-eyed Meg told how the nose of the supposed Mrs. Densill had diminished visibly in size under the influence of Lena's match, he could hardly doubt any longer.

"I shall telegraph for Ashwin in the morning. Lena, you must not crow over me because I have been taken in by an impostor."

"I won't. Shall you tell him, Nell?"

"I don't know. Won't his wife's nose do that for me, Lena?"

"You must tell him," said Meg, gravely, "or how are you to break off all intercourse with him? And, I suppose, now you will hardly care to see him at the Rectory?"

"I think," returned Nell, coolly, "I shall give no particulars, but just drop him a line, and say my wife objects to the visits of a gentleman whose better half declines to associate with her. Better not let him know that we've found him out, Lena."

"I had rather."

"It might be dangerous."

"I thought you might go to him and demand Helen."

"I couldn't do that; my father might."

"You will send to him, of course!"

"I shall telegraph."

Mr. Densill never received the rebuff Dr. Charteris contemplated. When he returned to the Hall after leaving Nell he found a letter from his London agent with this mysterious information:—

"Clue found at last. Lose no time; come at once!"

"Lydia," said Mr. Densill, seeking out the demure Miss Cath while enjoying her solitary supper, "you can pack up and return to your mistress to-morrow."

"I should have done that, anyhow, sir, after the way you've treated me," and Miss Cath detailed her grievances at full length.

"It was a ruse, and I rather suspect Mrs. Charteris of it. How I hate that woman! But I can't stop to be revenged on her now. I have good news, Cath; we're on the track at last

Tell your mistress I have found the missing clue."

"And Mrs. Densill, sir—her that's upstairs, I mean—what am I to do with her?"

Densill laughed.

"She would be rather an awkward companion for you to manage alone on a railway journey. I think you had better lock her up in her own apartments till we return. Happily she will need neither food nor clothing."

"And what am I to tell the servants?"

Densill was a man of expedients.

"I shall leave before they are stirring. Tell them Mrs. Densill was so far recovered she preferred accompanying me, and that you're to follow with the luggage. All you've to do is just to turn the key on those two rooms."

"I did that, sir, before I went out."

"Then I don't see you need ever enter them again! Tell Mrs. Raymond my wife is particularly anxious they should not be opened or interfered with."

"And that note, sir. It was a hoax, and I always feel suspicious of them."

"It must have been sent by Mrs. Charteris, but as she didn't come here and make a hellabaloo in your absence, I confess I can't see her object. I shall just drop Charteris a note, saying unexpected business hurries me to London."

Nell received the note just as he was writing his own.

"What does that mean?" and he tossed it to Lena. "You see he specially mentions his wife. Does he know of your discovery?"

"No; the woman has found out, and is afraid to tell him!"

"And what sudden business has taken him to London?"

"I hope he has not found a clue to his wife's hiding place. His real wife I mean!"

"Well, I shall be glad when Ashwin comes. I feel uneasy."

But a telegram from Mr. Ashwin's office informed them that gentleman was taking his holiday, and in foreign parts. He was believed to be in Italy, but were by no means sure.

Nell shook his head.

"That's no good!"

"Send for Gay Vernon."

Dr. Charteris did more—he rushed up to London, and drove straight to the chambers in Cecil-street, Strand.

The landlady shook her head.

"It's my belief, sir, he's dead."

Nell gasped. Certainly extraordinary things were happening around him.

"My good woman, I had no idea he was ill! You shock me terribly!"

"Well, sir, it's only my opinion. Three weeks ago he just went off in a cab, without saying a word to me about when he should be back. I got dinner for him that night. I got breakfast the next day, but he never came to eat it. There's a pile of letters as high as my table awaiting for him. I've had people by the dozen after him, and I've told them just what I tell you. Now, it was three weeks yesterday he went off, and I've heard nothing since!"

"But have you taken no steps to ascertain?"

"I never pry into my lodger's affairs, sir! Your friend he was a real gentleman; he paid me the first three months' rent about a week before he went, and I'm pretty sure he'll pay me the next three months' when it's due if he's above ground. If he isn't I can send in the bill to his ma, or if she disputes it the furniture he left here and knock-knacks are worth double the money. I don't feel at all uneasy, sir!"

"And he was in his usual health up to the time he went away?" inquired Nell, who almost despaired of interesting Mrs. Crump on any subject apart from her own interests.

"I never was one, sir, to stare at the gentleman. He didn't complain, anyhow."

Nell wrote a brief message on a card.

"Will you give that to him if he returns," and he slipped a sovereign into the lady's hand;

"and if you find out where he is I wish you'd send me word. My address is on the other side."

"Sure I will, sir, I'm always glad to oblige a gentleman, which behaves as such."

And Nell was out again in the pleasant September sunshine, wondering what steps to take; for it seemed to him that Sir Guy Vernon, Baronet, had disappeared as suddenly and as mysteriously as the girl who had once been called Nell Charteris.

"Telegraph to Lady Decima," was his wife's advice, when he got back late that night, weary and dispirited. "I have persuaded Meg to stay one more day; she could not bear to go away while all was so unsettled."

"Why in the world are she and Aunt Maude roaming about?"

Lena laughed. "I have no idea. Meg is most mysterious; she won't answer any questions, but says Lady Maude has a friend with her. Whether she uses the word 'friend' in the same way as a domestic servant uses the relationship 'cousin' I can't say, nor yet whether the 'friend' belongs more specially to Aunt Maude or herself! but Meg is certainly very eager to get back, only she wanted to take the last news of our family mystery with her."

There was nothing alarming in the message which travelled to the widowed mother—"Dr. Charteris, the Rovery, Charteris; to Lady Decima Vernon, Vernon Grange, near Ckepstow. Please send me Sir Guy's address."

The reply was far longer, and then no light on the subject:—

"I can't give you my son's address. I have heard nothing from him for a month. His last letter was dated from his chambers, but his landlady says he has not been there for weeks."

"He can't be lost too," said Meg, gravely. Nell, how mysterious life seems getting!

"I don't like this about Vernon. He was the last man in the world to act like this."

"I thought he was always suave."

"He has spent several years abroad, but unless he told his mother beforehand she was not to expect letters he wrote regularly. In this present case he seems just to have walked out of his rooms as though he was going to his club—and to have taken over three weeks about the journey."

"It seems like a conspiracy."

"Against whom?"

"Finding Helen. First Mr. Ashwin is away, then we can't summon Sir Guy, and Lord Charteris is abroad! There is literally no one to act but you, Nell, and you have a dozen patients on your hands."

"Ashwin must be back soon. Clegborn and Harris might undertake the quest. They were Nell's guardians; perhaps I had better send for them. Meg, send a line to Lady Maude, saying I can't spare you till to-morrow, and I'll telegraph off at once for Clegborn."

The head partner obeyed the summons in person. It had been a very peremptory one, and he was at first inclined to resent it; but when, in a long quiet talk, Nell laid the whole case before him, when he had heard the testimony of Mrs. Charteris and her sister-in-law, and paid a visit to the Hall, where Mrs. Raymond, grown quite brave in Miss Catt's absence, quite enjoyed introducing him to the waxwork substitute for her mistress—then the lawyer grasped the seriousness of the case, and was only too eager to undertake it.

"You can send Ashwin to confer with us if he wants to have a finger in the pie, Dr. Charteris, but it is far more in our line than his."

"And you will find her!" pleaded Lena. "Only think what she may be suffering now! And if that man gets hold of her he may kill her."

"Never!" declared Mr. Clegborn, fiercely. "My dear young lady, Mr. Denzell would never harm a hair of his wife's head. Why, the moment the breath's out of her body he's a pauper. If he hates her like poison he won't hurt her. He'd be like the man who killed the goose which laid the golden egg."

"I never saw her," said Lit, simply, "but my

heart aches for her; she seems to have been so unfortunate."

"I thought when I saw her she had the sweetest face except her mother's. Ah! Dr. Charteris, it is a thousand pities his family ever quarrelled with the colonel about his marriage. After all he chose a lady, and one of great beauty. Just think of all the misery that has sprung from that old feud!"

"We will make it up to Helen, sir, when we find her, as soon as some legal deed can be drawn up to separate her from her husband. I know my father will gladly welcome her as a daughter."

"But how is she to be found?" asked Lena, eagerly. "We know nothing, absolutely nothing, about her, except that she has not been seen since January."

"Since her wedding day," corrected the lawyer. "I saw her within a few hours of the ceremony, and I know of no reliable person who has met her later."

"Is it any use to summon Denzell to produce her?"

"Not the least, sir. If it was in his power to produce his wife I don't suppose he'd have bought a waxwork dummy to represent her. There's only one thing for it, to place the matter in the hands of the police. Luckily I possess a likeness of my late ward, and here is such uncommon beauty that I have little doubt, with the picture's help, a clever detective will have the original."

"I never knew she had been photographed!"

"The photograph has not been very long in my possession. My partner and clerks have no knowledge of the late Mrs. Charteris, and so could not be expected to recognise her daughter from the resemblance. It occurred to me some time that if I were away Mr. Denzell could easily palm off a spurious Helen Denzell upon us, and perhaps obtain a fraudulent advance of money. To this end I applied to Mrs. Hamilton for a likeness of my ward, and she sent it at once."

"And you have brought it here?"

"Decidedly! My first impression on reading your husband's mislaid was that he required my presence to solve some disputed identity, and I put the likeness from precaution into my pocket! It does not do your cousin justice, Mrs. Charteris, but you will admit it is a lovely face!"

But Lit, instead of expressing the admiration he expected, cried excitedly,—

"Meg, it is she! I have found her! Tell me where you met her!"

Miss Charteris looked perplexed. She gave a glance at the likeness, then she just clasped her hands, and said gravely,—

"Thank Heaven!" "Are you growing demented?" asked Nell, a little out of patience. "What in the world do you mean?"

"It is the girl I told you about!" cried Lit. "Don't you remember, Nell, I found her in the Park, and she was so sorry your grandfather was dead, because she was going to ask him to help her. Her father was a soldier, and had met one of your uncles in India. Oh! Nell, how could I have been so stupid! Why didn't some instinct tell me it was Helen?"

"But was it?"

"Yes; there could not be two such faces. She looks happy and childlike here," touching the photograph; "and when I saw her she was sad and careworn; but I cannot be mistaken. I could swear to her face."

"So could I!"

"Meg too!" said Dr. Charteris, smiling. "The plot thickens; but, my dear Lit, and you, my thoughtful sister, where is this beautiful unknown you are so sure of recognising as your cousin?"

Lena's face fell.

"I left her with you, Meg!"

"And I did not lose sight of her, Lit. Aunt Maude told me to keep it secret, but surely she could not mind now?"

"Any aunt in the world would absolve you from secrecy now, Miss Charteris!" said Mr. Clegborn gallantly. "If you can tell us where

poor Mrs. Denzell is I think you are bound to do so."

"She is quite safe; she is with Aunt Maude. She told us very little of her history, only that her one desire was to keep hidden from her husband."

"Poor child!" breathed the lawyer.

"Had they quarrelled?" asked Nell.

"It was not a quarrel; it was worse. She told us she had often slept in the open fields, but she never stretched herself on the hard turf without feeling thankful she was not in her husband's poisonous house."

"He must have been cruel to her."

"He was, indeed! When the baby died—"

"The baby!" interrupted Lit. "Was there a baby?"

"The baby!" repeated Nell. "Great Heaven!"

"When the baby died," went on Meg, with two great tears stealing down her cheeks, "she looked like one whose very heart is broken, but all she said was—'Don't cry for her; at least she is safe from her father.'"

"The mother shall be safe from him too!" cried Nell, hotly. "If English law can make her. Mr. Clegborn, surely she can be freed from this monster!"

His womanhood were forbearing. Neither wife nor sister conceded Nell that two nights ago this "monster" had sat at his table an honoured guest.

"We will do our best!" said Mr. Clegborn, emphatically. "I am afraid there will be no grounds for a divorce. We may manage to get a judicial separation, but then he'd claim some of her income, I expect."

"Let him take it all," said Lit, "so that she has her freedom."

"You have not told us where she is, Meg!" said Dr. Charteris, suddenly.

"She is with Aunt Maude at Nares Edwards's."

"I will drive over to-morrow. No, Lena,"—and he shook his head at his wife—"I can't take you; the excitement will knock you up, and you look dreadfully ill now. I will make Aunt Maude promise to let her *protégée* pay a long visit to the Rovery instead, and you shall pet her to your heart's content."

"If she will let me—If she can forgive the wrong that mine have done her."

"Nonsense!"

"My dear young lady," said the courteous old lawyer, "what wrong can you possibly have done my poor ward?"

Lena flushed crimson.

"I am Mrs. Morton's sister, sir."

"And as different from her as light from darkness. My wife never can forget that relationship, Clegborn. She hurls it in people's teeth whenever she gets a chance."

Mr. Clegborn rose and bowed to his young hostess with old world gallantry.

"I assure you, Mrs. Charteris, I can wish no greater happiness for my ward than to become your guest."

"She is a shockingly neglectful hostess," said her husband, teasingly. "Only fancy, Lit, Mr. Clegborn has travelled over a hundred miles to-day, and here you are keeping him up gossiping till after midnight! You should have more consideration."

But the eyes which rested on Lena's face were full of tenderest love, and the listeners knew perfectly well, even while he uttered that jesting reproach, Nell Charteris thought all his young wife said or did perfection.

"Light the candles, please, then," said Lit, penitently. "Meg is going to sleep here to-night, and then directly after breakfast all you good people are going to drive to Mrs. Edwards's, and I am to be left here alone."

"To prepare a nest for our unhappy guest," said Nell, gently. "I shall bring her back with me if she is at all fit for the drive. Mrs. Edwards's rooms are far too small for an invalid."

"She said they were Paradise."

"Poor child!" said Dr. Charteris. "Just think what her life must have been lately, and she the lady of Charteris Hall!"

As for Meg she slept the sleep of the just—that happy, dreamless slumber which is the most refreshing of all repose. She had nothing to make her anxious or restless; everything was shining out as beautifully as things do generally only in the last chapters of a three-volume novel. Her cousin would be restored to her rightful position, and freed from the power of her husband's cruelty; the sweet-faced wail who had stolen into her heart of hearts would take her place as lady of Charteris Hall. All was well, and Meg rejoiced with great joy.

But Lena's slumbers were far different from those of her sister-in-law. She declared, on first seeking her pillow, she was too excited to sleep, and when her eyes at last closed she tossed to and fro in restless feverish snatches of repose, and more than once woke Nell by her bitter cry of "Too late! too late!"

"What were you dreaming about last night?" he asked her, when he had condemned her to breakfast in bed, and was going downstairs himself. "What was it that proved too late?"

Lena lifted her two bright eyes to his face, and whispered,—

"Your journey."

"H!"

"I am quite sure of it—quite sure you will not bring Nell back to me; you will arrive too late."

Dr. Charteris laughed, and told his wife she was the most superstitious creature he had ever met; but that assertion did not prevent his setting off with his sister and the lawyer a good half-hour before he had intended.

"How delighted Aunt Maude will be!" said Meg, who herself was in a state of intense gladness. "You have no idea how fond we both are of Pearl—of Helen, I meant to say!"

The horses were fresh, and in the heat of spirits; the drive was a very rapid one. Almost before Meg knew they were near Gloucester the carriage was stopping before Nurse Edwards's door.

"We need not knock," said Miss Charteris, quickly; "let us go straight in."

She turned the handle of the door and opened it, wondering just a little the sound of wheels had not brought her aunt or the old servant to the window. In the little drawing room stood Lady Maude, in conversation with a stranger. Was it a stranger? No, Meg recognised the man she had seen coming out of the Rovers. Then, in spite of all their precautions, Reginald Denzil had found his wife.

"But you will save her from him!" pleaded Meg, clinging to Mr. Clegborn's coat-sleeve as she had never in her life clung to anything masculine before. "You and Nell will protect her, won't you?"

"Hush!" said her brother's voice. "Listen!" and so the three stood just inside the door, quite unnoticed by the excited pair, whose *tête à tête* they had marred.

"I tell you," thundered Denzil, "I know she is here. No human creature has a right to stand between husband and wife."

"But they have a right sometimes to interpose between tyrant and victim. I fancy, sir, that was the true relationship between the unhappy girl I tried to help and the man she married."

"That girl is my wife."

"I am powerless to contradict you. I never even heard her name, and cannot form an opinion of the truth of your claim."

"She is my wife, once Helen Charteris, now Mrs. Denzil, of Charteris Hall."

"Poor child!"

The listeners held their breath. They admired Lady Maude's courage, and yet longed to rush to her assistance. Suddenly Mr. Denzil turned and saw them.

"Ah!" he said, with an exclamation, which sounded like an oath; "now, my lady, I have a witness whose testimony you dare not dispute. There," pointing to Mr. Clegborn, "stands my wife's trustee, who could identify Mrs. Denzil in an instant. Perhaps you will believe him if he tells you the girl you are taking from me is my wife."

"I am ready to credit any statement of Mr.

Clegborn," said Lady Maude, moving gracefully to the lawyer. "But, Mr. Denzil, there is one thing I should like to say concerning the young lady who for some time has been my guest. It is a fact which grieved me unspeakably when I discovered it, but for which I return thanks to Heaven."

"Let us hear it," said Denzil, "it will make no difference. The girl you call Pearl is my wife, and I mean to take her away with me."

"I think my information must alter your plans awfully."

"I swear it shall not."

"Then listen. Pearl left my protection yesterday, and I have not the slightest idea where she is."

"It is a lie."

"Sir," cried Charteris, fiercely, "remember to whom you speak. The Lady Maude is incapable of falsehood."

"Let me speak to him, Nell," said the gentle widow, who seemed suddenly imbued with courage not her own. "Mr. Denzil, you may ask the whole household; you may go to Dr. Williams. From all you will hear the same tale. While I was asleep yesterday, in the gloaming, between the lights, the child I had learned to love almost as my own took her fate into her own hands, and left my protection."

"At what hour?"

"Half-past seven."

"There must be magic in it," growled Denzil, hoarsely. "At half past seven I started in search of her."

And then, seeing there was no more information to be gained, he suddenly turned on his heel and left the house.

(To be continued.)

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

—10—

(Continued from page 297.)

There were many questions to answer concerning her presence at the time of the accident, many guesses as to the relationship between her and the Captain; but none ever knew the truth except Stephen and I, none ever will.

And now that she was gone those who had scorned and condemned her pitied her, and paid some tribute of honour to her whose whole life had been so sad.

Even Sir Locke was sobered for awhile, and dismissed his guests; but the funerals took place from the Lodge.

A great crowd of rich and poor filled the churchyard to overflowing, and wondered not a little that my lady should not be with the dead and gone sisters; but that was Sir Locke's one act of grace.

"She would have wished to lie beside him. Let it be so," and now, to-day, two marble crosses stand side by side where my lady and her lover sleep until the last day comes.

The Vernons came in troops and shed crocodile tears over the relative they had helped to kill, and talked of her grace and beauty, their affection for her, and then went back to their old amusements and forgot her and their sins against her.

When Captain Heatherleigh's will was read it was found he had made a generous provision for the woman he so loved, and I was astonished to find myself a legatee.

But my dear lady needed nothing now.

She was beyond all human wants, all cares and griefs; and knowing how bitterly she had suffered, and what a cruel thing life must always have been to her, I could not wish her back again.

But the Captain's generosity made things smooth for us.

Father now made no objection to my marriage, and as the "Lyster Arms" at that time became empty, Stephen applied for and obtained the house and licence.

There were not a few who said but for my

money Stephen would never have married me; but I could afford to laugh at them, remembering our engagement had been renewed before my little fortune came to me.

So I held on my way, and in due time I was married, and I settled down to my new life at the quaint old inn.

We were very happy, Stephen and I, although tears would come, and my heart would be heavy when I thought of my beautiful, unfortunate mistress.

The Hall was closed, and Sir Locke had gone to foreign parts, but we heard all tales of him which I fear were only too true, and just three months after my lady's death he married Lady Clara Kenwood.

Perhaps she hoped by her marriage to get back into the old county families, to be received again by society. But when, six months later, she returned to the Hall, she learned her mistake, and then, as she had never loved her husband, she made his life a burden by her complainings; and to crown all her wickedness ran away with a rich American, and folks said Sir Locke was glad.

Of her we never heard again, but Sir Locke remained at the Hall until all his fortune was spent and his creditors came down upon him.

Then some relatives stepped forward, and offered him assistance; but the old house was sold, and he was sent to live at a cheap foreign place, the name of which I cannot remember, and no one in England will ever see his face again.

But my lady and her lover sleep side by side; the grass grows green on their lowly graves, the flowers bloom brightly there, and when the work of the day is over, I take my little ones to the quiet churchyard, and tell them tales of the beautiful lady who loved me so well, who lifted me so far above my proper place, and in my heart I thank Heaven for the full and divine mercy which snatched her from sin, though even "AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR."

[THE END.]

GIVE HIM BACK TO ME.

—10—

CHAPTER XVIII.—(continued.)

RALPH thought that he had never seen her look so beautiful before as now, with that exquisite flush on her cheeks, that light in her glorious eyes; and yet, though his whole heart went out to her in warmest, most fervent admiration, he was furious to think that that flush and that light were brought to cheek and eye because of the love that filled her heart—the love for another man! Still he tried to be calm, and his voice was low and steady, as he said, slowly,—

"I will give you till Thursday afternoon to decide. If you are still bent upon acting the part of Nora to that impostor's Captain Archer, I will do my worst, as you suggest." Then he bowed low, and left the room.

Violet looked after him, with a vague terror in her eyes, then sank on the sofa in sudden collapse, like a mechanical doll when the spring has run down. Why did this strange excitement possess her? Why was she trembling from head to foot? What was Mr. St. John to her that she should take up his quarrel as if it were her own?

She could not understand, but hot blushes suffused her cheeks, hot tears ran down them; and with a gasp she flung herself face downward on the cushions.

There was some surprise expressed in the drawing-room as to Mrs. Sartoris's long absence, and presently Cyril slipped out of the room to see if anything had gone wrong with her.

He stood still in the hall, listening to every sound, and wondering in which direction to go in order to find her. Some door was open which ought to have been shut, and he could hear the servants talking and laughing over their supper. And then, as there was a pause whilst somebody was pondering a fresh witticism, another

sound broke on his ear—a sound of passionate sobbing. He started, listening with all his ears, then made a dart at the library door, which was ajar, hurried across the room with quick steps, and dropped down on his knees beside the sofa, his kind heart full of pity.

"Violet, my poor child, what is it?" he asked, taking her hands in his, and holding them tight. No answer. He bent his head till his fair hair nearly met her soft brown curls. "Violet, tell me; remember I'm your oldest friend."

No answer! He looked at the bent head with wistful eyes. It seemed so cruel not to be able to help her, when there was nothing on earth that he would not willingly have done to comfort her.

"Violet, speak to me!" He stooped and kissed her little trembling fingers, hoping that the touch of his lips might rouse her—and the next moment a hand was laid violently on his shoulder, and he was thrown sideways on the floor.

Then Violet sprang to her feet, and looked with wild eyes from the man lying on the carpet like a dead log, to the other man standing before her, his face like a thunder cloud.

"That fellow is a scoundrel," said St. John, hoarsely—"a scoundrel who gets between man and wife. I am sorry I did it before you, but I would have liked to have killed him if I could!"

"Oh, hush! hush!" with a gesture of horror, as she dropped down on her knees, and raised the fair head tenderly. There was blood flowing from the right temple, for Cyril's forehead had struck against the corner of the fender, and in the first fright she thought he was dying. "Oh, you've killed him!" she moaned.

"He's only fainting; but if I had, would you have cared?"

"Cared! Yes, I—I—shall miss him all my life!" her breast heaving with a tearless sob, as she pressed her dainty, befrilled handkerchief against the wound. "Go—I—I can't talk to you; fetch somebody else to help him. Only—go!"

His face was white as Landon's, as he folded his arms across his chest.

"If I told you that once for all you must choose between him and me!" he said, in a low voice, throbbing with pain.

"There is no choice between you. He is my best, my truest friend," struggling against the wild longing in her heart, which even then was drawing her towards this man whom she had only known for a few weeks.

"And he is more to you than anyone else in the world!" his voice scarcely above a whisper.

Half distracted, she looked up at him, the tears on her long lashes, her lovely lips quivering.

"Is there anyone else? No one cares for me like him—my more than brother! Oh, Heaven! if he dies what will become of me!"

"I thought you had a husband!" in cold deadliness.

"I thought so once; but either he is dead or he has forgotten me. I don't know, and I don't care," pressing her hand over her forehead. "Go!"

Mr. St. John leant against the table as if half dazed.

"You have the face to tell me that you don't want to have him back!" his whole heart hanging on the answer.

And she, never guessing how she stabbed him, puzzled and bewildered by conflicting memories which seemed to clash with present feelings, answered, passionately,—

"Yes; it is too late. Heaven knows I've looked and longed and listened through endless years, and prayed each day might bring him; but now—now," sobbing convulsively, and letting one tear after another run down on Landon's unconscious face, in a way that maddened St. John.

"And now," he echoed, hoarsely, "Landon is more to you than your husband!"

She did not heed or even hear him, but bent

over the delicate face of the man who had always been her truest friend, and never wronged her even by a thought.

The blood had ceased to flow; but the cheeks and even the lips were deathly white. A terrible fear possessed her. What if he should die, and die by Mr. St. John's hand? Would she lose them both at once? The one on a sick-bed after a brief illness, the other on the gallows!

Jack hesitated. He had asked his last question and received, as he thought, his answer. His heart was bursting with rage and disappointment.

He had seen so many tragic sights in his life in the wilds that he could not understand how a woman could be terrified because a man had simply fainted.

Therefore he took Violet's terror for a sign of her passionate love for Landon, and stepped forward with an irresistible longing to separate her from him.

Apparently there was something terrible in his expression, for as he came nearer she stretched out her hands as if to protect Cyril from a savage enemy.

Jack saw the gesture, and it cut him to the heart. Did she take him for a murderer? Forgetting his wild words of only a few minutes before,—

"You needn't be afraid," he said, huskily; "only his wife might prefer to see him on the sofa to—in your arms."

"Mabel would be thankful to anyone who helped him," she said, quickly; and then, as she was drawing away from him with a sudden heat in her cheeks, Cyril opened his eyes and smiled up into her face, and she forgot Jack—forgot everything in the shock of intense relief.

Such a look came upon her face as she thought of Mabel saved from the misery of widowhood, such tears rolled down her cheeks in a flood of joy, that Jack clenched his fist, and felt like a second Othello.

Out of the room he stumbled, whilst the roar of a storm broke overhead, and the windows rattled, and the doors shook, and the storm in his heart was fiercer than that outside.

Ralph Armitage was standing in the hall, with an open telegram in his hand which he had found upon the table. His face was grave, and the other guests, who were grouped around him, looked as if they had heard some startling intelligence.

Lady Stapleton had her handkerchief to her face, but when she drew it away at the sight of Mr. St. John there was no sign of tears; and even to a suspicious observer, actually a twinkle in her eyes.

Armitage marched up to St. John, and staring him straight in the face, said, sternly,—

"Jack Sartoris is dead! I appeal to you to tell me how or where he died!"

Jack looked at him with resentful amazement, taking it all for a miserable attempt at a joke. What did the fellow mean? Was it a sharp trick to make him disclose himself before he chose to do so? Had Armitage some sinister object with which his wife was connected?

His mind was in a fog, and he was in no mood to be badgered. His only wish was to escape from the prying eyes all round.

"Go to the deuce!" he said, roughly; and pushing Armitage aside he made straight for the hall-door; and just as he was, in his evening things, and with a bare head, he stepped out into the storm.

Lady Stapleton ran to the door, calling out for "Mr. St. John! Mr. St. John!" but there was no answer, only a shower of rain-drops came on her handsome dress, and a flash of lightning forked, and dangerously lit up the frowning sky.

"Oh! what will happen to him!" she cried, clasping her hands in a genuine fright. "What could have induced him to go out like that!"

"A guilty conscience," said Ralph Armitage close to her ear, whilst a throb of hope shot through his heart. If Sartoris was dead, it was for him to go in and win!

CHAPTER XIX.

LADY JANE'S TELEGRAM.

"Oh, what will happen to him!" cried Lady Stapleton. "If I were a man I would go after him."

"I am a man, but I stoutly refuse to do anything so insane," said Ralph Armitage, coldly. "Don't bother yourself about him; he isn't worth it, I assure you."

"Not worth it! How can you tell?" flashing a quick glance into his face.

"I know more about him than you think," in a low voice, which filled her with alarm.

Had he guessed Jack's secret? But if so, why did he pretend to believe in Sartoris's death, and look quite tragic about it? She could not understand what he meant, and looked from his grave face to the telegram in his hand, which so unwittingly told a lie.

"You know nothing about him at all," she said boldly, though inwardly very nervous.

"I know a great deal, and I suspect still more," he answered, grimly, and then someone stepped forward and inquired if poor Mrs. Sartoris was to be told of her loss.

"Certainly not!" said Lady Stapleton, hastily. "I would not tell her for the whole world!"

"But surely that would be a great mistake!" and Armitage frowned. In his eagerness he longed to be the first to break the news, in order to find out at that moment of the shock what had been her real state of feeling towards her husband. If she had never loved Sartoris, her grief would not be so intense as to prevent her from being led easily into love by somebody else, especially if that someone else had earned her eternal gratitude by saving her life.

"Dear Lady Stapleton," he went on, earnestly, "do let me persuade you to tell her at once; you can do it so gently and carefully; or, if you like it better, I will tell her myself!"

"Are you mad!" and Lady Stapleton opened her eyes in horror. "Are we to be in such a hurry to tell her that she's a widow before we know that the man is dead?"

"But the man is dead," tapping the pink form impatiently. "Jane says so; and she wouldn't say it unless she knew it was true. We haven't seen the evening papers. Evidently someone brought the last edition down to the Forresters. It is strange—awfully strange!" his voice growing awe-struck. "Jane had a presentiment about the other accident, and now he's done for somehow."

"It was very good of Lady Jane to take so much interest in my niece's husband," a certain asperity in her tone.

"They were old friends—poor fellow! I knew him tolerably well years ago. I liked him then, but lately I've been devoutly wishing him out of the way."

"Then you were almost as good as your sister"—sarcastically. "Jack would be very much obliged to you"; and then it came across her that she had forgotten the part she ought to play, as she caught a look of grave surprise on Armitage's face. Hastily she wiped her dry eyelashes with a delicate handkerchief, which refused to look damp, and heaved a tremendous sigh, which was echoed sympathetically by several others.

A solemn silence fell upon all, in the midst of which came a crash of thunder which seemed to make the whole house tremble. The women looked terrified, and moved en masse towards the drawing-room, as if thought they they would be safer amongst the pretty nick-nacks, the comfortable couches, Persian mats, etc., than in the hall.

"Let me see, when did it happen?" a Major Graves asked Armitage, as they brought up the rear.

"We only know that he is dead. How, when, or where remains to be found out."

"Who is dead?" said a soft voice behind him, and, turning quickly, he saw Violet close at his heels with Landon, looking almost haggard, and deathly white. He was so taken aback that the colour rushed up into his face and he remained quite silent.

"We are afraid that somebody may be killed," said the Major, looking kindly down into the pretty

frightened face, and saying the first thing that came into his head. "The lightning looks dangerous."

A small hand clutched Armitage's sleeve.

"Why don't you speak?" trembling from head to foot. "You are keeping something back. I must know—I will know." Her agitation increasing, Ralph looked round in dismay, but the ladies had gone into the drawing-room, and the whole responsibility of what was to be said rested on him alone.

"Where's Mr. St. John?" she asked eagerly. "He won't refuse to tell me. Go and fetch him."

"I can't. He's not here. He's gone out."

"Gone out!" catching hold of a corner of a card-table, and swaying as if in a wind. "Oh Heavens! I told him to go, and he's gone, and you say he's dead!"

"Nothing of the sort," fiercely. "He's as well as you are yourself, and a great deal better." She put her hand to her head. Cyril asked a question of Major Graves, who told him in a whisper all they knew. A rush of joy had passed over Violet's heart, and she waited a moment to steady herself. Her voice, nevertheless, had a tremble in it, as she said, "Then who is it? You must tell me, please. Is it I? Is it?"—she was going to say "my husband," but the words seemed to cleave to her tongue.

Cyril guessed her meaning in a moment, and drew her hand through his arm, for he knew how her poor little heart was fluttering. "It is a friend of Jane's, and Armitage is interested about him as well."

She looked up at him with trustful eyes, her lips still quivering. "You wouldn't deceive me, would you?"

"None of us want to deceive you," he said, gently; "only Lady Stapleton thought there was no use in telling you till we knew."

"Then it must be a friend of mine, or she wouldn't care. Tell me his name!" imperatively.

Armitage looked at Landon breathlessly; but Cyril did not lose his presence of mind, and told the truth when he seemed to be telling a lie. "Dalrymple," he said quietly, and neither of the other men recollected that that was Sartoris's second name.

"Dalrymple!" said Violet, with a deep-drawn breath. "Then that must be a cousin of—of the Sartoris's!"

"Some relation," said Landon composedly. "And now, if you will take my advice, you'll go straight off to bed. Do you know it is midnight?"

"I couldn't sleep till this storm is over," with a shiver, as the lightning flashed through the diamond-paned windows, and she thought of the one who was wandering alone in the storm outside; "and it doesn't matter about me. How are you?" looking anxiously into his face, in a way that angered Armitage.

Would the day ever come that she would look at him—the man who had actually saved her life—as if she had a particle of interest in him!

"Do you feel better?"

"Oh, I'm all right!" cheerfully. "Do you suppose I made a fuss about a knock on my head at Eton?"

"Who gave you the knock?" said Armitage, quickly, as a sudden suspicion shot across his mind that something had been happening of which he knew nothing.

St. John had looked like the hero of a tragedy, Landon was like a ghost, Mrs. Sartoris was looking strangely upset before she heard a word about the telegram. What could it be?

"I had a fall," Cyril said, quietly. "I don't exactly know how it happened."

"Those mats in the library are so dangerous, you know," put in Violet hurriedly. "It is so easy to catch your foot."

"There are other things dangerous besides mats," and Armitage looked at her keenly. "Strange that St. John never mentioned a word about the accident."

"St. John! How should he know anything about it?" asked Cyril, with interest, for he

had never known who his assailant was, and had only a dim idea that he had seen him standing over him when he revived.

"How could he?" exclaimed Violet, with an attempt at innocence, which deceived neither Armitage nor Major Graves. "Oh, here you are Auntie!" in a tone of relief, as Lady Stapleton appeared on the threshold of the drawing-room. "I want you to tell Cyril that he can't go home to-night."

"But indeed I must; Mabel would be terrified."

"Mrs. Landon would be much more terrified if you were brought in on a hurdle. Of course you will stay. It isn't fit for a dog to be out, or I would send a messenger to the Lodge. I will speak to my housekeeper; and, Violet, I'm going to carry you off at once."

Cyril bade Lady Stapleton good-night, and thanked her, then quietly slipped away saying something about "a smoke." Not long after the sound of horses' hoofs was heard in the stable, for nothing would induce him to frighten his young wife by staying at Holly Bank when he had no means of letting her know where he was.

He reached home safely, and was rewarded by the cry of delight with which Mabel threw herself into his arms.

"Not in bed!—you naughty child!" he said, lovingly, as he kissed the tears from her soft cheeks.

"No. How could I rest till I knew you were safe? Oh, this night has seemed as long as twenty!"

"I wish I could have come before!" regretfully; "but all sorts of things have been happening. Do you know they say that Sartoris is dead!"

"Oh, poor Violet!" her eyes filling with ready sympathy.

"Some people think it is a good riddance," sitting down wearily on the sofa.

Mabel looked at her husband with critical eyes. She had never seen him look so ill and out of spirits. Was it possible that he was regretting that he was not free as well as Violet?

A dart like the thrust of a sharp knife went through her heart, and for a moment the pretty room where they had spent so many happy hours together swam round before her eyes.

"But you don't! You are not glad, Cyril!" she asked, with a throb in her voice.

"It seems a terrible thing to say, but I am glad," looking down at the carpet, as if he were studying it. "Now the poor girl is free, and may have a chance of happiness."

"How cruel of you! She must have loved him once, and now he is gone—gone without forgiveness."

"He had nothing to forgive."

"We can't say that. There may have been something—we don't know."

"Nothing!" emphatically. "I know enough of Violet to swear to that."

"Oh, you'd swear to anything for her," in an offended tone.

"Well, I won't swear I haven't a headache," with a tired smile. "I've had a knock on my forehead."

"A knock, and you never told me!" all her jealousy vanishing in a moment as her devoted wife's affection came to the fore. "Where is it? Oh, Cyril!" as a black bruise caught her eye, which had been half hidden under his hair.

In spite of the lameness which still affected her powers of walking she would not let anyone else wait upon him, but buried herself to supply all his wants.

Her favourite remedies were applied to the bruise, and a soft handkerchief, soaked in eau de Cologne, tied over it.

Cyril laughed at the fuss she made, and declared the eau de Cologne ran down into his eyes; but he was really feeling very bad, and was thankful to lay his head upon the pillow, with his wife's small hand clasped in his.

And there was not a thought in his heart that she might not have known, though Violet Sartoris was said to be free.

Why was it that fate made these two inno-

cent people—Violet Sartoris and Cyril Landon—objects of jealousy to so many loving hearts?

CHAPTER XX.

"SAY YOU LOVE HIM!"

WHY this fearful feeling of unrest? Why this constant presentiment of evil? The other members of the household had all gone to bed in spite of the storm, though the thunder still crashed overhead, and the lightning flashed its fiery darts, and a wild wind blew in sudden gusts that threatened to break the ancient elms and bring their proud heads down into the mire.

The house was as silent as the grave as Violet stole out of her room and drew the heavy curtain aside from the large window of the corridor, the branches were swaying and tossing in the wind, the clouds were scudding past; an owl beat its wings against the glass, and, uttering a plaintive screech, like a prayer for shelter, flew on into the darkness. It was an ill-omened cry—the cry that precedes some dread disaster, and her heart sank as she heard it.

"Mrs. Sartoris, what are you doing here?" asked Armitage's voice lowered to a whisper, close to her shoulder.

She started violently, and wished him a hundred miles away.

"I could not go to bed with all this noise going on. I should not have slept a wink."

"Nor I. I feel as if I had enough to-night to keep me awake for the rest of my life."

"Ah, then you are frightened, like I am. Isn't it awful?"

"Awful! No. Come in here," pushing open the door of Lady Stapleton's boudoir; "you will be more out of the draught; and you can watch the storm just as well."

Violet followed him into the room, rather glad of his companionship for the first time in her life; for the loneliness in the silent house, in her present state of mind, had added to her alarm. She was still in her simple white evening dress, and he was in a gorgeous smoking-jacket, having just come from the smoking-room, where he had been drinking brandy and water, and reading a French novel, from which his thoughts strayed constantly to the very woman who was now alone with him in that quiet room.

He lit the candles on the mantelpiece with a match from his pocket, whilst she walked towards the window and shrouded herself behind the velvet curtains. He looked after her, and his pulses throbbed as he thought of the telegram from his sister. She would never have sent it unless the news were true; therefore Violet Sartoris was free to be wooed and won; and there was no reason why he should not be the one to win the prize—no reason if that fellow St. John were only out of the way. Curse him!—curse him a thousand times.

And then he went up to her, and asked her what she was looking for, knowing what the answer ought to be if she spoke the truth.

"I like watching the lightning," she said, evasively. "Do you think it is very dangerous?"

"I hope not, for Mrs. Landon's sake. Cyril had a long ride home."

"Yes, but his horse is so quiet, and that other one is so spirited," her voice trembling as she thought of the beautiful thoroughbred who had carried his master so well.

Where was that master now? She would have given every jewel she possessed to have found a satisfactory answer to that question.

"What do you mean?—St. John was on foot," looking down into her anxious face with angry eyes.

The colour rushed into her face, and she turned her eyes away.

"Someone told me that he went into the stables and saddled his own horse, and rode off at a mad pace."

"So much the better. He has fled from discovery, and we can let him go, can't we? Look here, dearest! Nobody on earth would take better care of you than I should. Won't you let this fellow go, and trust yourself to me?"

His voice was hoarse with excitement, and he tried to put his arm round her, but she shrank from him in horror and loathing.

"How dare you insult me!" she cried with flashing eyes. "But you are mistaken. If you think I have no one to take care of me. I have a brother; and I would rather trust myself to the veriest tramp in the road than to you!"

He drew a deep breath, and placed himself before her as she tried to escape.

"How have I insulted you?"

She drew herself up like an insulted queen.

"By forgetting that I am a married woman."

"Then you would forgive me if I told you that I thought you were free?" his wild heart beating like a hundred hammers.

Some of the anger passed away, and the old puzzled look came back to her lovely eyes.

"Free!" she repeated, vaguely. "How could I be free?"

"Your marriage was no marriage at all. You parted from your husband on your wedding-day. Sartoris deserted you. I, Ralph Armitage, saved your life. Which do you belong to most?"

She stepped back, and held up her hands to shield herself from the glow in his eyes. Their gaze seemed to scorch her; his words troubled her brain.

He was a man of the world, a gentleman. Surely he would not tell her a lie! Could the solitary years that had passed wipe away all meaning from those words—"Till death us do part!"

And then with one bound her thoughts leapt from the man before her to that other man whom she had sent out into the storm.

Now—now, when he was in danger, she knew that she loved him. The mere thought of him seemed like fire in her veins; and she was told she was free—free to love him; free to give herself to him; free to be happy as if Heaven had come down from the heights above to those grovelling depths below.

Her eyes shone, an ecstatic smile played round her lips. For a moment she rejoiced in her unfaded youth, in the beauty which her glass told her was as glorious as ever, in the radiant possibilities of the future.

"Answer me—to which do you belong most?"

His question scarcely reached her intelligence, or roused her from her dream. But with a sweet smile, she said softly,—

"If it weren't for you, I should not be here now."

His face lighted up.

"And are you glad to be here—here with me?"

No answer, but he took her small hands in his, and she did not draw them away. A strangely rapt expression came over her face; in fancy, she was listening to another's voice, and thrilling under the touch of another's hand.

But Ralph could not guess this; his heart was lifted upon the wings of unexpected hope, and every pulse was throbbing. Thank Heaven, Sartoris was dead, and no dishonour could touch her through his love.

He stooped over her, the most passionate words welling up from his heart to his willing tongue, when the storm broke forth with new violence and strength, a tall elm became a sheet of flame, and whilst burnt, and scorched, and blackened by the lightning, was torn up by the roots through the force of the wind, and flung prostrate on the ground, carrying a May tree with it on its way.

Violet stood still in breathless fear, as the window-frame rattled, and the very floor under her feet seemed to shake with the roll of the thunder. The glory of her dream was roughly dispelled, and with a piteous cry, she exclaimed, "Oh! think of him, think of him! Would to Heaven I could save him!"

Armitage's face darkened.

"Why should I think of anyone else? You are all the world to me!"

"Mr. Armitage, you must not talk to me like that; as if she suddenly awoke to the consciousness that he was behaving more like a lover than a friend. "I—I think I'm half mad to-night.

But oh! if you've a grain of pity in your heart, try to save him if you can."

"Whom do you mean?" his voice cold and hard.

"Mr. St. John!" very low.

"You want me to save that man!" fiercely.

"Why?"

"Do you want a reason?" her lips trembling.

"Wouldn't the Christian charity make you try to save a life?"

"I wouldn't stir an inch."

"He is an old friend of my aunt's."

"That does not affect me."

She clasped her hands in despair.

"Say you love him—and upon my honour I'll go."

With a cruel delight he watched her keenly, knowing that she would almost die rather than confess the truth. Her head drooped, her bosom heaved.

"Well, am I to go or not?"

"Go," in a low voice.

"Then you confess that you love him?"

With a groan, she murmured "Yes."

He ground his teeth, and threw back his head, whilst she felt as if she must sink through the ground.

There was a sinister light in his eyes as he marked the exceeding grace of her slight girlish figure, as she leant against the window-frame with drooping head. There was not another woman in the world to be compared to her, and there was no longer any barrier between them.

His soul went out to her with a great irresistible longing, and he felt he would rather be hanged than give her up to this interloper and impostor.

"Mrs. Sartoris," he said, hoarsely, "if I find St. John alive and well—if I ask him to come back, and he refuses—if he says he can never claim your love, neither now nor in the future—"

He paused, whilst she turned away her face that he might not see the smile that hovered on her lips, that shone out of her eyes. Would he refuse? She didn't think so.

"If he stays away, and proves himself the impostor that I say he is—"

"Only find him—never mind the rest."

"But I must mind the rest. Do you think I am going out into this detestable weather without some promise of a reward?"

"No, no; only say what you want!" in a fever of impatience.

"I want you—falling St. John. Will you?"

There was no possibility of misunderstanding his meaning. He wanted her to be his wife. He would not go unless she gave at least a conditional promise, and yet, till only an hour or two ago she had thought herself for six years the wife of another man.

"Was that marriage in the Abbey a dream? Did six years' absence constitute a plea for divorce, or abrogate a marriage without further trouble?"

Her brain reeled; she caught hold of the window-frame because the floor seemed to be moving under her feet.

"You know I can't," she gasped. "Why—why do you ask me?"

"I swear you can. Answer yes or no. Say yes, and I'll go," looking down at her troubled face with pitiless eyes.

"Oh, go—go!" wringing her hands. "I will promise anything I can!"

"Listen—I'm telling you the truth. You have no husband!"

She staggered back as some cloud seemed to clear away from her brain. Through the long vista of years she saw him—Jack Sartoris—his handsome face turned towards hers, his honest blue eyes looking down into hers, his warm, strong grasp holding her hands so tenderly; and throwing up her arms in passionate yearning, she cried "Jack!" and fell in a heap on the floor.

Armitage, without waiting to see the effect of his words, dismayed by the sound of footsteps in a distant corridor, had vanished quickly from the room.

If anyone saw him and Mrs. Sartoris together

at that hour of the night what food it would give for scandal!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BRAND OF CAIN.

RALPH ARMITAGE went out into the stormy night in a curiously excited state of mind. He determined that everything he did at the beginning should be done publicly; therefore, he roused up one of the grooms, and told him that he wanted a horse at once, as he was going out to look for Mr. St. John. James stared sleepily, and suggested that Mr. St. John would not be likely to be out on the roads at that time; there wasn't a bird or a beast who didn't try for a shelter somewhere.

"I know that; but the ladies are anxious, so I said I would do my best."

"Shall I come with you, sir; it seems safer for two than one alone!" inwardly hoping that the answer would be "no," but knowing that he would get a scolding from his mistress if he didn't offer.

Mr. Armitage declined all assistance, mounted hastily, and rode out of the yard into the wild and stormy weather, ready to face any danger that could bring Violet Sartoris nearer to himself.

She had sent him off to bring rescue and help to another man, without any more thought or care about his own safety than if he had been a mere machine guaranteed against all accidents. His heart was full of rage and bitterness, and dark resolve. He was to find this man St. John, but he was not going to be such a fool as to bring him back.

He took the road to Farndon Court, feeling sure that that was the place to which St. John would naturally turn.

It was a long ride, and anything might have happened to him on the way—or anything might happen supposing he had not reached the end yet.

Ralph was tolerably satisfied with his own position. Jack Sartoris was dead, and this other man had some guilty secret, which he had half-discovered. There must be some crime in the background, or why did he change his names according to his place of residence? An alibi was always suspicious.

The darkest thoughts, like the flashes of lurid lightning, kept darting through his mind. St. John must never return. If the worst came to the worst, he must be stopped by force. There was surely evidence enough to have him arrested. A man who called himself by one name at Farndon Court, and another at Holly Bank, must be a scoundrel and an impostor.

Violet Sartoris must be saved at all hazards from marrying a man who might one day have to stand in the criminal dock. Yes, at all hazards!

Good heavens! what a night it was! As the branches of the trees tossed their arms wildly over his head, and swayed backwards and forwards, now this way, now that way in the wind; as the pitchy darkness was every now and then lighted up by a red flash, which seemed about to bring death on its lurid wing; as the thunder growled like the voice of a god in anger. Violet had not cared a straw whether his horse took fright; whether he lost his seat, and came with a crash to the ground; whether the lightning slew him with its deadly flash; whether a tree in falling crushed the life out of him.

All these dangers were to be braved by him in order that St. John might be saved.

A grim smile crossed his lips. Of all people in the world he was the last whom she ought to have sent to save the man he hated.

Why not have asked Landon, who was a cut above the rest of mankind, and would have risked his life any day to save his bitterest enemy; or Graves, who had no grudge against the fellow; or the grooms, who would have been obliged to obey orders, however much they hated the job, and been comforted by the thought of a possible fiver!

No; it was Fate sent him—Fate, who always provides tools for the unscrupulous, oppor-

tunities for the criminal; and so he had come out with life in his hand and death in his heart, more ready to destroy than to save.

"Steady, good horse!" patting Pinafore's neck. "We've had enough of this, haven't we?"

But though he felt he might reasonably come back after having gone so far on a fruitless errand, something drew him on.

Was it the tempter leading him on to crime? Was it his better self urging him to persevere, and not give up before his task was done?

On, further and further, down the wind-swept road, where not a single living creature was moving except himself and his horse; further still, with darkness behind him and darkness before, and nothing to guide him but the outline of the hedges on either side, seen every now and then in the flame of the lightning.

This was the sort of expedition to suit a good Samaritan, or one who had worn the Geneva Cross; but Ralph Armitage was a man who loved his ease, and would have thought twice before crossing a muddy road to pick up a fallen child.

He hated the rain which dashed into his eyes and soaked him to the skin; the wind, which would long ago have robbed him of his hat if he had not taken care to secure it to his button-hole; the thunder, which seemed to speak to his guilty conscience, and warn him of the doom which awaits the sinner.

He hated it all, and cursed the man who had brought this on him; but he knew that he would be more than amply paid if Violet were true to her word.

Great heavens! how he loved her!—not with the love that Cyril Landon felt for his fragile wife, but with a fierce, overmastering passion that would brook no opposition, that had no generosity in it, no self-sacrifice, and nothing ennobling, because it was essentially of the earth earthly.

Hark! there was a sound—the neighing of a horse. It sounded quite weird in the whistling of the wind. Ralph thought of Trumpeter; but he smiled at the fancy. What would Trumpeter be doing out there—even a horse has a strong objection to such a storm as this.

The trees met in an arch overhead like the aisle of a church, and straight on ahead there was a stone bridge over what was usually a quiet trout stream.

Now it was a brawling river, whirling broken hurdles and uprooted trees with relentless force on its rapid course.

Armitage pulled up as he neared the bridge, for his quick eye caught sight of something blocking up the way.

It was a horse standing right across the road, the reins hanging loosely over his head, his nose thrust into the brushwood at the side. One glance told Armitage that it was Trumpeter, the beautiful thoroughbred which belonged to St. John.

He sprang to the ground and looked round. The horse lifted its head and whinied, shaking nervously, either with cold or fear.

Armitage knew that some horses were as capable of devoted attachment to their masters as dogs, and felt certain that St. John was close at hand.

He unstrapped a small lantern which the groom had lent him, shaded it from the wind between himself and Pinafore, and lighted it with a match.

Then he held it out till its light streamed upon dripping leaves and broken branches, with the river foaming at the bottom of the steep bank.

He had no need to look further. There, close in front of him, lay the man he was looking for; his head stood almost still when he found him at his feet.

A hat was caught in the branch of a thorn. That branch was all that remained of the tree, which was blackened and scathed and ruined for ever by the electric field.

The flash must have passed close to St. John, for his coat was scorched, and as he turned his face upwards and scanned it with critical eyes, he saw that the beard was singed and the features blackened.

For a moment he thought that his rival was dead, and his heart gave a bound. Hastily he thrust his hand inside the overcoat, the fine cambric shirt, and found a faint pulsation.

All was not over yet. He had come in time to save him. Either his horse had thrown him, or he had been struck down by the lightning, and if he (Ralph Armitage) had not appeared upon the scene there he would have lain face downwards, and possibly have been suffocated in the tangle of wet leaves and mosses.

Armitage put his hand to his forehead, and remained just as he was, with his knees on the wet sod, deep in thought; but though his body was so still, his thoughts flew through his brain like ill-omened birds on the wings of the storm.

So many courses lay open to him. He might pass a few drops of brandy from the flask he had brought with him, through St. John's lips, and then when he had revived help him on his horse and take him home to Holly Bank. He could imagine with what joy he would be received, and how he himself would be forgotten.

He could go away, and leave him there just as he was, and trust to chance that he would never recover; or he could make quite sure that this man whom he hated should never trouble him again. The choice lay in his own hands. St. John seemed to beckon him. A cold sweat broke out upon his forehead, his heart beat like twenty; he started wildly as Trumpeter stamped and shook his dainty head.

Confound the horse, couldn't he stand still for a moment! He looked round savagely at the animal, and then back at his master's face. How still it was in its chiselled beauty—a face that women were sure to love!

Yes, curse it! a face that had stolen the heart of Violet Sartoris, when no one else could move it. He thought of her with the tears in her eyes, and a prayer on her lovely lips longing for his return; and moved by a sudden impulse of frantic jealousy he seized the helpless body; the eyes opened, and looked him straight in the face. The lips began to move, and then with all his strength Armitage sent his rival crashing down the bank. He listened breathlessly till a smitten splash which sent the spray up into his eager face, told him that St. John had gone from out of his path for ever, and then he drew back with a convulsive shudder. A shivering as of palsy seized him.

That last look bewildered his brain. Those eyes seemed to be the eyes of a man whom he had not seen for years. The truth flashed upon him in one awful moment. He saw it as if written in fire before his eyes. St. John was Jack Sartoris, and this was the meaning of the alias!

He had killed Violet's husband! The telegram was a lie, but this was the truth. Violet would hate him if she only knew; Jane would curse the day that he was born. He had done to death an old friend, who had done him no wrong; for surely a man may make love to his own wife.

He stepped forward, caught hold of a branch and looked down into the wide whirl of the waters. A man full of energy and strength, with all his faculties on the alert, would have had a hard struggle for life with the force of the current. A man in a state of syncope had not the slightest chance. The first splash signed his death-warrant; and then, as he saw what he had done, and knew that even then, in the gloom and the darkness, the eye of Heaven could see him, a great terror seized him, he stumbled back through the wet branches, found his horse, felt for the stirrup with fingers that were shaking like a frightened child's, managed to mount, although his knees knocked together, and his teeth chattered, and dashed homewards, as if pursued by a host of fiends.

While Trumpeter, riderless and forgotten, followed close at his heels like an accuser, the stirrups knocking against his glossy flanks, the bridle hanging loose and broken; and raising his head every now and then with a dismal neigh, as if asking for his master!

(To be continued.)

THE MOST NUTRITIOUS,
EPPS'S
GRATEFUL—COMFORTING.
COCOA
BREAKFAST—SUPPER.

TOWLE'S PENNYROYAL PILLS
FOR FEMALES.

QUICKLY CORRECT ALL IRREGULARITIES, REMOVE ALL OBSTRUCTIONS, and relieve the distressing symptoms so prevalent with the sex. Boxes 1/4 & 2/6 (contains three times the quantity) of all Chemists. Send anywhere on receipt of 15 or 24 stamps, by E. T. TOWLE & Co., Manufacturers, Dryden St., Nottingham.
Be aware of Imitations, injurious and worthless.

KEARSLEY'S 300 YEARS' REPUTATION
WIDOW WELCH'S
FEMALE PILLS.

Awarded Certificate of Merit for the cure of Irregularities, Anemia, and all Female Complaints. They have the approval of the Medical Profession. Beware of Imitations. The only genuine and original are in White Paper Wrappers. Boxes 1s. 6d. and 2s. 6d., of all Chemists. 2s. 6d. box contains three times the pills. Or by post 14 or 24 stamps, by the makers, G. and G. KEARSLEY, 17, North Street, Westminster. Sold in the Colonies.

HAVE YOU TRIED
KEATING'S LOZENGES
FOR YOUR COUGH?

ANY DOCTOR WILL TELL YOU "there is no better Cough Medicine."—One gives relief: if you suffer from cough try them but once; they will cure, and they will not injure your health; an increasing sale of over 80 years is a certain test of their value. Sold in 1/4d. tins.

In the canary-breeding establishments of Germany, only the male birds are valued, for the females never sing. The method of training the birds to sing is to put them in a room where there is an automatic whistle, which they all strive to imitate. The breeder listens to the efforts of the birds, and picks out the most apt pupils, which are then placed in another room for further instruction.

With a sense of the debt we owe to these intelligent and patient servants, England has led the way in establishing a hospital for invalid and aged horses, where the less opulent among horse-owners may give their old favourites a peaceful autumn to their industrious lives, and where the poor man's beast is provided with rest, care, and doctoring to bring him as comfortably as may be through the ailments of horseflesh and send him back to the shafts sound and well.

The true mahogany tree is a product of the American tropics, but has been so near extermination that the wood of kindred species is now largely imported from Africa and the Far East, especially the inexhaustible forests of the Sunda Islands. The Slatonia glauca of Borneo is equally fine grained, but a trifle paler, though after being soaked in oil the wood is almost indistinguishable from that of its South American congener, and takes a brilliant polish. Extensive groves of the genuine mahogany are said to exist in Eastern Peru, but under present circumstances are more inaccessible than those of Senegambia.

FACETIÆ.

A cat has nine lives, which shows that Nature had a pretty fair idea of what the cat would have to go through.

MOTHER: "Johnnie, your face is very clean, but how did you get such dirty hands!" Johnnie: "Washin' me face."

FRIEND: "Got a lawyer!" Prisoner: "One." Friend: "Way don't yer git two!" Prisoner: "I ain't guilty 'nough for that."

THE SYMPATHETIC FRIEND: "I wouldn't borrow trouble." The Unhappy One: "I don't have to. My family gives me more than I need."

"DEY ain't no politics in Heaven," says Brother Dickie. "But de reason er dat is—dey ain't no politicians dar."

DEALER: "Don't your shoes fit, madam!" Madam: "Oh, yes, they fit me perfectly; but they hurt me awfully when I try to walk."

It is said that many women drink vinegar for the complexion. They must be the sour-faced women we sometimes see!

TOM: "I thought you and Rebecca were the same age!" Jim: "We were; but she seems to have receded while I've been going on."

MRS. CORNWIGGER (shaking carpet): "Which end shall I take, dear?" Cornwigger: "Wait till I see how the wind is blowing."

CHOLLY: "And was my present a surprise to your sister, Johnny?" Johnny: "You bet! She said she never suspected you'd give her anything so cheap."

INVALID (to sympathising caller): "My dear, I have lost nearly all my hair." Literal Child: "I know where it is mamma. I saw it in your dressing table drawer."

HE: "I thought you told me that the governess was highly cultured. I addressed her in French just now, and she didn't understand me at all." SHE: "No wonder, she's French."

A DOCTOR went for a day's hunting, and on coming home complained that he hadn't killed anything. "That's because you didn't attend to your legitimate business," said his wife.

"I SUPPOSE your wife, like mine, will give the usual cigars for Christmas?" "No; I've cured her of that." "How?" "Smoked 'em in the house."

SALVERMAN: "An interesting book! Yes, madam. How will 'The Sorrows of Satan' do?" Madam: "No, thanks. I have troubles of my own."

MAUD: "Did you say I painted!" Marie: "I did not. I said you powdered." Maud (reluctantly): "Oh, well, that puts another complexion on it!"

"WELL, Jim couldn't pass the Civil Service business in geography an' arithmetic." "What's he going to do now?" "Dunno; but I suppose he'll go back to school teaching!"

Somehow a man feels much worse the day after he has lost an hour's sleep on account of the baby than he does the day after he has lost five hours' sleep at cards.

THEY say a carrier pigeon will go further than any other bird," said the boarder between bites. "Well, I think I'll have to try one," said the landlady. "I notice a chicken doesn't go very far."

BRIDGE: "The doctors say I am suffering from a complication of diseases." Griggs: "How many of them have you seen?" "Seven." "The trouble with you is that you are suffering from a complication of doctors."

"HAVE you bought any Christmas presents yet?" asked the girl in grey. "Oh, dear no; not yet!" replied the girl in red. "Why, I have only succeeded in looking over the things in twelve shops as yet! I doubt if I shall do any buying for another week."

"WHAT song shall I sing for you to-night?" she asked him. "Sing that old Scotch song, 'I canna leave the old folks yet; we'd better bide a wee.'" O George, that is a very ugly song! It suggests procrastination. Let me sing that beautiful song, 'Just Now.'"

MRS. SLIMSON: "Here, Willie, while I am away I am going to give you the key to the pantry, just to show you I can trust you." Willie (proudly): "I don't need it, mamma. I can pick that lock any day."

MOTHER: "Allice, I was very much surprised and shocked last evening when I passed the parlour door and saw Mr. Woodbe with his face close to yours." Daughter: "Yes, mamma; isn't it a shame the poor fellow is so awfully nearsighted!"

"So you wish to take my daughter away from me!" remarked her dotting father. "Well—ah, that wasn't exactly my thought," stammered the nervous young sailor. "My folks could perhaps spare me with fewer pangs!"

MOTHER: "So you enjoyed your walk, Kate. Did you go all that distance alone?" Daughter: "Oh, yes, mamma, quite alone." Beatty Brother: "Then how is it, Kit, you took an umbrella out and brought home a walking-stick?"

DAUGHTER: Oh, mamma, I do wish I were pretty." Mother: "You needn't, dear; sensible men think very little about beauty." Daughter: "But it isn't sensible men I'm thinking about, mamma; it's Charlie."

"No," said Miss Spinster, "I wouldn't have any fool of a man." "And as you can't get any other kind," remarked Aunt Susan, "you prefer to remain single. Well, I don't know as I blame you."

"Mr wife," said the fat man, "announced her determination to write all her letters to me from Paris in French." "Did she stick to it?" asked the lean man. "Nobly. Except, of course, when she wrote for more money."

MISTRESS: "Do you think that young policeman who calls here so often means business, Norah?" The Cook (blushing): "I think he do, mum. He's begun to complain about my cooking already."

MISS JONES: "Professor, do you dare to look me in the face and say that I originally sprang from a monkey?" Professor (a little taken aback, but equal to the occasion): "Well, really, it must have been a very charming monkey."

"A MAN arrested last night was found to have two good five-pound notes in his pocket." "He's a criminal. There must be something wrong with a man who has so much money about him so near Christmas."

PATER (impressively): "I'm sure, my children, we ought to be very thankful for all these mercies." Guest (thinking to support the sentiment): "And such a goose I never saw at the head of any table!"

WIFE: "I was scared half to death to-day. A tramp came along the street, and I thought he was coming in here." Husband: "I left my pistol upstairs." "Yes, but you forgot to unload it."

FIRST HEN: "There comes the woman to drive us out of her garden." Second Hen: "Yes, and she's picking up a stone, too. Let's fly out—quick!" "No, no; stay here." "But she's aiming right for us." "Yes, and if we move we might get hit."

"I WILL say," remarked the young woman, "that he is not afflicted with that self-consciousness which marks the person of deficient culture." "No," answered Miss Cayenne, "he isn't at all self-conscious. He will be tiresome by the hour without being in the least aware of it."

"WHY is it," the pretty young widow asked, "that you never married?" "Well," said the rich bachelor, "you see, I had five brothers." "But I don't see what that had to do with your prejudice against matrimony." "Wait! They got married before I could have a chance, and I've always had a habit of noticing things." She walked away.

SOPHY (who accepted Mr. Charles Fleetwood the night before): "Does Mr. Fleetwood strike you as being a sensitive man, Pauline?" Pauline (who doesn't know of the engagement): "Gracious, no! A man who has been rejected by fourteen girls within six months and gets fat on it cannot be sensitive. Why, Sophy! what's the matter?" She had fainted.

BUTCHER: "Have you any orders this morning, madam?" Young Wife (who is keeping house): "Yes, that sheep's heart you brought me yesterday was very fine. I want another one; but be sure and get it from the same sheep, as my husband is very particular."

SALLIE DE WITTE: "That's Mrs. Allie Monseigh. She has been married and divorced five times." Noel Little: "How remarkable for one so young in appearance! Her matrimonial reigns must have been very short." Sallie De Witte: "Mere showery!"

AN old gentleman when passing a little boy selling newspapers at a street corner remarked: "Are you not afraid you will catch cold on such a wet night, my little man?" "Oh, no," replied the boy; "selling newspapers keeps up the circulation, sir."

THE MENDICANT: "Beg pardon, sir; but I haven't had anything to eat for a week." The Philanthropist: "Let me congratulate you upon your success in so interesting an experiment. It must be a great saving to you, and I'm sure you're looking well."

FOGG: "I visited one of our schools to-day. The teacher asked some hard questions. One of them was this: 'For what is Patagonia noted?'" Brown: "And what is it noted for?" Fogg: "I don't know. Guess that's the right answer. At any rate, that's the one all the scholars gave."

"WHAT was the trouble at the house where the complaint came from yesterday?" asked the superintendent of the gas company. "Nothing much," replied the inspector. "I found a centipede in one of the pipes." "Ah! an extra hundred feet. See that they're charged for that."

DAUGHTER: "Where are my rubbers and my waterproof, ma?" Mother: "In the upstairs closet." Daughter: "Did you take my umbrella up there, too?" Mother: "Yes." Daughter: "I wish you would send Bridget up to the garret for my furs." Mother: "Where on earth are you going?" Daughter: "I'm going to a garden party."

MOTHER: "Mary's young man has left already and she has just gone to her room in tears. I wonder what the matter is!" PATER: "Give it up. What are you laughing about, Willie?" Willie: "They had a scrap. I heard 'em. She said she was giving him more kisses than he was givin' her, and he said it wasn't so. Then they both got mad."

TESS: "I never saw anyone so slow as Mr. Timrus." Jess: "He is slow, isn't he?" Tess: "Awfully. We were sitting in the parlour last night and he suddenly said: 'If you could only see how much I love you I'm sure you would let me kiss you.' I told him 'I couldn't see it in that light,' and he just sat there like a stick."

"THIS," said the drug clerk, "is a most wonderful hair restorer. It is our own preparation." "Well, give me a bottle," said the bald-headed man. "But, say, come to think of it, why don't you use it? You're pretty bald yourself!" "I can't use it. You see, I'm the 'Before Using' clerk. The 'After Using' clerk is out at lunch. You should see him."

HE was rather a rickety young man and kept very late hours. He was going on a long journey, and on bidding farewell to his beloved he said to her: "Darling, when I am far away, every night I will gaze at you star and think of thee. With thou, too, gaze at you star and think of me!" "I will, indeed, dearest," she replied. "If I needed anything to remind me of you I would choose this very star." "Why?" he asked. "Because it is always out so late at night and looks so pale in the morning."

"WOMAN," he said, wearily, "has no idea of economy of labour. Of course, she has a hard time in many ways, but it's largely her own fault. She likes to work." "Why do you say that?" she demanded. "Why, just by way of illustration, there's that curtain lecture you have given me every lodge night for over a year. Same old lecture delivered in the same old way, and still you fail to take advantage of modern inventions. Just think what a saving it would be if you used the phonograph!"

SOCIETY.

THE Queen will reside in the Isle of Wight until the middle of February, and is then to return to Windsor for three weeks before going abroad.

THE Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse will probably spend February and part of March at St. Petersburg, where they are to be the guests of the Emperor and Empress at the Winter Palace.

THE Queen has always had a great objection to make any arrangements in advance. Her Majesty will not even consent to definite plans being made a day sooner than is necessary. The plans for the journey to Bordighera have to be discussed, but very little is said to the Queen on this or any other arrangement for three or four months ahead.

THE Duchess of Coburg and her youngest daughter, Princess Beatrice, are coming to England shortly from Germany on a visit to the Queen at Osborne. The Duchess will afterwards proceed to St. Petersburg for a stay of several weeks, and during her visit to Russia she will be the guest of the Grand Duke Sergius and the Grand Duchess Elizabeth at Moscow for a fortnight. The Duchess will return to Coburg early in April, it being her intention to spend the summer in Germany.

AT Frogmore, Her Majesty has a handsome aviary containing about seventy pigeons, mostly Jacobins. In the centre of the aviary is a small sitting-room, in which the Queen often took tea. On the walls are preserved many of the birds which formerly lived in the aviary, including silver pheasants from Japan, brilliant Indian pigeons, and a peacock which once was the property of Lord Beaconsfield. The Queen has never exhibited any of her pets in public.

THE Queen of the Netherlands has an enormous fortune, part of which belongs to the Crown, while the rest is her own private property. The Royal estates in Holland and in the East are also of great value. Queen Wilhelmina is going to settle twenty millions of marks upon her future husband, the arrangements being that the interest (say £30,000 a year) will be at his disposal, while the capital is ultimately to pass to the younger children of the marriage. If there are no children, Prince Henry is to have absolute power of disposing by will of five millions of marks, while the remainder will ultimately revert to the Queen's estate.

THE Queen's love of music is widely known; but few people outside her own circle are aware that Her Majesty, as a singer, could have held her own in the professional world, as her voice, a mezzo-soprano of charming quality and sweetness, was cultivated to the utmost by Signor Lablache, the famous basso, who for eighteen years was the Queen's teacher. Her Majesty is admittedly a critical listener to singing, which is not surprising when one learns that she herself was educated in the very best school of singing, her voice being produced on the old Italian method, which is almost a lost art in the present day. Her talent for music was of a high order, and she was a most satisfactory pupil, always anxious to improve and to do all the necessary practicing to achieve proficiency in singing scale passages, &c.

THE long-postponed coronation of the Emperor William as King of Prussia is to take place at Königsberg on Friday, January 18th, when there will be State festivities extending over four days. All the German Sovereigns will attend the coronation, and the Courts of Europe are to be represented by Royal personages, among those expected being the Prince of Wales, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the Grand Duke Francis Vladimirovich and the Grand Duke Sergei, the Duke of Sparta, the Duke of Aosta, the Crown Prince of Sweden and Norway, Prince Albert of Belgium, the Crown Prince of Rumania, the Duke of Oporto, the Crown Prince of Denmark, and the Duke of Connaught. The coronation is to take place in the Royal Schloss, where the vast Moskovitzer Saal is being prepared by Court functionaries from Berlin for the ceremony.

STATISTICS.

OF the 3,700 Gauchos in New Zealand only twenty-six are women.

THERE are nearly two thousand stitches in a pair of hand-sewn boots.

THE average age of the men now at the front is nearly two years higher than that of the soldiers who fought at Waterloo.

IF syphilis—that is, preventable—diseases could be banished, the average life of man would be increased by six years.

GEMS.

HE is young enough who has health, and he is rich enough who has no debts.

POETRY is the frolic of invention, the dance of words, and the harmony of sounds.

EVIL thoughts swarm only in unoccupied minds. Be busy about noble things, if you would be saved from the ignoble.

NO one can ever nourish within himself a generous spirit who refuses to perform the small offices of generosity that lie continually in his path. Nor can any one persist in fulfilling them without experiencing a gradual response in his own spirit of goodwill and friendliness.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LOBSTER CROQUETTES.—Boil a medium-sized lobster and mince the meat, mixing in the coral rubbed to a paste. Moisten one cupful of breadcrumbs with cream and add to the meat; add also one teaspoonful each of anchovy essence, lemon-juice and salt, one-fourth of a saltspoonful each of pepper and mace, and the beaten yolk of an egg; heat together on the stove, and then remove. When cold form into little flat cakes or balls, roll in crumbs, dip into beaten egg, roll again in crumbs, and fry in deep fat, and strain on paper.

TAPIOCA MERINGUE.—Soak overnight two ounces of large tapioca in one pint of milk. Next morning boil slowly in the milk for half an hour, or till soft and thick. Then let this cool a little; after which stir in the beaten yolks of two eggs. Grate the rind of a lemon on to one ounce of castor sugar, and add this to the tapioca. Put a layer of jam in a glass dish, pour the tapioca mixture on top, and leave till cold. Beat up the whites of the eggs into a stiff froth and flavour with vanilla and castor sugar, and the last thing spread this over the tapioca. Sprinkle over the top either finely-chopped pistachio nuts or pink sugar, and serve.

FRIED SAUSAGE AND POTATOES.—Four or five cold potatoes, salt and pepper. If the sausages are all of meat they don't require to be pricked, but if they have bread, as they very often have, they require to be pricked or they will burst. Put the sausages in a pan without any fat. Prick them and do not have the pan hot. Let them get hot very slowly, and keep turning them round and round till they get brown all over. They will take ten minutes, or fifteen, but see that they heat very slowly to keep them from bursting. Take them out and keep them hot. Now put the potatoes in the pan, bruise and stir them with a fork. Put a little salt and pepper with them to season. Stir them about till they are well mixed with the fat in the pan, then press them together into one side of the pan and flatten them. Leave them on the fire for a few minutes and turn over on a plate. They should have been nicely browned. Arrange the sausages on the top of the potatoes and serve very hot. This is good and economical.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE sun, earth, and stars are all made of the same elements.

HUNTING the wren is a Christmas custom in the Isle of Man and parts of Ireland.

HOLLY grows in all Northern European countries, as well as in Canada and the United States.

By British law, pheasants and partridges may not be killed on Sunday or on Christmas Day.

ON Christmas Day the sun is above the horizon at London for seven hours and forty-seven minutes.

THE solar orb would appear blue to anybody who should view it outside of this planet's atmosphere.

ALL the inhabitants of Norwich were at one time provided with a free breakfast on Christmas Day by the farmer of the church property.

HOLLY, bay, rosemary, and laurel were the favourite Christmas decorations up to a hundred and fifty years ago. Ivy and mistletoe were not used in churches.

MILLIONS of acres of fertile land in Haiti remain uncultivated. Sugar, tobacco, and oranges of the first quality could be produced there at an enormous profit.

A PIECE of red-painted board left out on a dewy night will be dry in the morning, while a board painted yellow, and laid beside it, will be soaking wet.

THE motor-hearse is the latest form of automobile. It has appeared in America, where the cemetery is usually a long way from the town, and where a slowly-moving funeral procession is being more and more regarded as a hindrance to business.

THERE is a special class of farm labourers in Sweden who are given so many acres of land for their own use in consideration of so many days' labour during the year for the owner of the farm. They are a sort of fixture to an estate, and their like exists in no other country.

THE decking of churches and houses with evergreens and flowers at Christmas may be to commemorate the victory gained over the power of darkness by the coming of Christ. The laurel was, among the Romans, the emblem of joy, peace, and victory; according to Chaudier, a relic of Druidism, that the sylvan spirits might repair to them.

A TURKISH lamp lighter is usually a tall and gaunt Mussulman, with a fierce moustache, an embroidered scarlet jacket and a huge turban. He plants his ladder against the wooden post on the top of which a common tin lamp is insecurely fastened, and, taking off the glass chimney, opens his umbrella to keep off the wind. The handle of the umbrella is tucked under his arm, and then, balancing himself on the rickety ladder, he proceeds to strike a light with his lucifers, carefully protecting the sputtering flames with both his hands. Naturally this is a slow process, and by the time the dozen lamps are lighted, everybody is safe at home; for the citizens do not go out at night, but retire to rest at a very early hour.

THE Queen's special medical household, if it may be so styled, is on a very small scale when compared with the enormous retinue of physicians attached to each of the Continental Courts. The Queen has four Physicians in Ordinary; each receives the moderate salary of £200 a year. It should, however, be added that, though the honour is considered a great one, the four gentlemen in question have very rarely an opportunity of actually treating their gracious mistress. As for the Honorary Physicians and Surgeons to Her Majesty, their name is legion, for they are taken from the Army, Navy, and Indian Medical Services. Then, again, many of the local Windsor medical men have some small Court appointment, and the same is true at the Isle of Wight, no fewer than three doctors, all closely related to one another, and all bearing the name of Hoffmeister, having each the appointment of Surgeon-Apothecary at Osborne.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

CORRECTOR.—The family surname is "usph."
MARCUS.—At any shipping firm or steamer.
G. M.—The two sons are equally responsible.
E. K.—They were in use in the days of Elizabeth.
C. P.—You should have done so before the purchase.
L. A.—Notice given and accepted on a Sunday holds good.

LENNIE.—Write to your late commanding officer and state same.

M. M.—We know of no institution or school. Ask a clergyman.

ANTHONY.—Yes, if done peaceably, and with the least fuss necessary.

OLD READER.—Of course he can offer you have received his notice.

H. O.—You can apply to the Herald's College, but it is an expensive process.

FRANK.—You may see a copy of the will at Somerset House on payment of a small fee.

JOE.—It depends upon custom, and we should think it likely that the clergyman has the power.

L. M. B.—Search first at the Divorce Registry, Somerset House. You will not need any papers.

CHARL.—A few cloves added help to keep it. Some add a few drops of oil of cloves for the purpose.

IRVING.—The woman having refused to rejoin you in the house you occupy is not entitled to separate aliment.

D. G.—You will obtain information as to copyright by applying to the officials at Stationers' Hall, London, W.C.

M. D.—We are unable to inform you of a process by which a mackintosh may be dyed. Apply to some professional dyer.

H. Q.—A grandson is legally bound to contribute towards the support of his grandmother as far as his free means will go.

HELEN.—Bathe the face in hot and then in lukewarm water as soon as you get indoors; dry carefully with a little powdered oatmeal.

WORMAN.—If house is damp enough to be unhealthy, you can leave it at once, but state in writing to landlord why you have done so.

EMILIE.—Boil four ounces of stick macaroni in milk till quite soft; lay in a glass dish and pour over it hot custard, nicely flavoured and served.

MILLY.—A little glycerine rubbed on face would induce healthier skin; use either very mild soap or none at all, but water in which oatmeal has been mixed.

C. B.—Probably if you first removed all trace of natural or artificial grease from the hair the dye would become more fixed. If naturally greasy hair, it is harder to fix it.

PIN.—Tarnished brass may be cleaned by rubbing with lemon cut in halves. If very dirty dip the lacings in a little ash silted through muslin and wash well afterwards.

C. P.—The census is taken on 25th March; the paper left with each household states clearly what requires to be filled up; name, age, sex, condition, occupation, and relationship to the head of the house.

FACILITA.—They show chiefly in fair complexions with reddish hair. A persistent use of buttermilk, applied at bedtime and left on all night, is most effective for lessening or completely removing them.

C. G.—Take the tea leaves which are left in the teapot, pour some hot water over them and let them stand ten minutes. Then pour the tea into a basin. Wash the paint with a clean flannel, and dry with a clean cloth.

EYE.—We should not call it reprehensible for a lady to attend horse-races, provided she is accompanied by a male escort, behaves with discretion, and avoids making herself conspicuous by loud talk and other unladylike behaviour.

IGNORANT.—The literal meaning of *à la tête* is "head band," *à la* being the French for head. The phrase is used to describe a consultation or interview wherein the parties sit with their heads close to each other, as lovers are supposed to be fond of doing.

H. W.—Empty the tick and have it washed and then mangled to make it as smooth as possible. Put it tightly on a table or board—a bit at a time, perhaps. Then take the cake of wax and with both hands rub it on till the surface is glazed. Go on till the whole is done.

MINTY.—Silver backs of brushes if rubbed daily with a chamoin leather will very seldom need a regular cleaning. If, however, you prefer to give a good clean occasionally, moisten a little whitening with alcohol, and brush the silver with this. Brush out again, and polish with a soft chamois.

JEMMY WREN.—Spread the part on a hard substance and take off what you can with a rag; then rub in a little salt and sprinkle that liberally with powdered chalk, and moisten both; after which let the article dry slowly in the sun, if possible. If necessary repeat the process, rinsing well after each operation.

T. B.—We think, in the circumstances, the grandfather is legally entitled to take possession of the children in order to have them trained in the father's faith.

CLARRY.—You need a proper polishing flat. These flats have rounded surfaces, and are faced with steel. They can be procured from any frontsmonger, and cost from one shilling upwards.

KESSE.—The presents at a silver wedding may be sent to the parties previous to the wedding night, as in ordinary cases, or taken and presented by the givers on the night of the meeting.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—A married man will not be enlisted if he honestly declares his condition, and is certain to be discharged if his wife makes an immediate application to commanding officer.

A. A.—To loosen a glass stopper from a bottle when all other attempts fail hold the neck of the bottle close to the lighted gas, turning it round all the time. The stopper will then come out easily.

A. MARTIN.—In cases of violent headache it frequently acts as a great relief to bathe the forehead with a sponge wrung out of water as hot as you can bear it. Repeat this as often as the sponge cools.

ANNY.—Equal parts of white flour and powdered salt; it must be well heated in the oven, and thoroughly put it through the fur. It must afterwards be well shaken to get out the powder.

ANNIE.—Fish should never be turned while broiling. Put the inside next to the coals and allow it to cook until thoroughly done. Then turn and just brown the skin side, taking care that it does not scorch.

L. G.—The method of communication used by the deaf and dumb in which the movements and position of the fingers are used to indicate letters or words cannot properly be called a "language," the word "language" indicating the use of the tongue.

THE HURRYING HOURS.

H. w often the thought comes home to me,

As the moments hurry away,

Of the many things I intend to do

Somehow, some time, some day.

There are promises that have not been kept,

Though I always meant to be true,

But time is too short for all the things

That a body intends to do.

I will write a letter or read a book,

I will write a bit of rhyme;

I will do the things that I ought to do—

Some day when I have time.

So I look beyond, as I hope and plan,

For the days that are just ahead,

While the day that is here goes into the grave

With its opportunities dead.

To-day is the only day we have,

Of to-morrow we can't be sure;

To seize the chance as it comes along

Is the way to make it secure.

For every year is a shorter year,

And this is a truth sublime—

A moment mispent is a jewel lost

From the treasury of time.

BACK.—Boil them long enough, a good sized one, for six hours, and hang them up in the cloth they were boiled in without disturbing them in a dry place; the kitchen will do if not too near the fire; they will keep good for a year.

OURAUS.—The application of the words "Dorcas Society" to a union of women for supplying the poor with clothing is in commemoration of Dorcas, who made clothes for the poor. You will find a reference to this charitable woman in Acts ix, 39.

WORMAN.—A little ordinary paraffin oil rubbed in with the palm of the hand once or twice a week in the mornings often proves a remedy. The small will go off quickly. Never use it at night, or near a candle or other light.

INQUIRER.—The Hellespont or Dardanelles is a narrow strait between Europe and Asiatic Turkey, which connects the Sea of Marmora and the Aegean Sea. The legend describes Leander as nightly swimming across the Hellespont to visit Hero, his sweetheart.

LEWONOX.—St. Cecilia is regarded as the patron saint of musicians, and to her it was vouchsafed to hear the angels sing. The angels, so a legend states, fell in love with her for her musical skill, and used to bring her, nightly, roses from Paradise, with which they crowned her.

PUNZED ONE.—Adam's Apple is the name given to the protuberance in the fore part of the throat, occasioned by the projection of the thyroid cartilage of the larynx. This name originated from a superstitious tradition, that a piece of the forbidden fruit which Adam ate stuck in his throat, and occasioned the swelling.

R. B.—A raw egg well beaten, half a pint of vinegar, an ounce of spirits of turpentine, a quarter of an ounce of spirits of wine, and a quarter of an ounce of camphor. These ingredients to be mixed together, first dissolving the camphor in the spirits of wine. Then put the mixture in a bottle and shake for ten minutes, after which it is to be corked down tightly to exclude the air. In half an hour it is fit for use.

INTERPRETER.—The boar's head was the predecessor of roast beef at Christmas dinner. It was served with a lemon in the open mouth.

A. K. N.—In some of the provinces of France babies' cradles are filled with clean bran, which is said to be more comfortable and hygienic than mattresses.

ELLA.—The best way to wash glasses is to put them in a bowl of cold water with a few pieces of brown paper, and let them stand for half an hour. This will prevent the glasses cracking or scratching, and when rubbed with a soft cloth they will polish beautifully.

A. C.—The sea trout is a sort of second cousin to the salmon; he belongs to the same family, but is not a salmon, although he sometimes attains the weight of twenty pounds or more, and the proportions of the salmon proper.

F. H.—It would be foolish for you to go to South Africa unless you have some capital to tide you over the time that you would be looking for a situation. There are at the present time at Cape Town thousands of refugees from the Transvaal and the late Orange Free State who are living "from hand to mouth."

ADA.—If brass, clean with rottenstone and sweet oil. If bronze, wipe them carefully, and remove all oil split over them. If lacquered, wash them with soap and water only. If they are feet inside they should be washed in potash-water, then well rinsed and thoroughly dried before the fire before any oil is put in them.

L. L. F.—Fish ought to be placed on a high shelf above the other food, and it should have a portion of ice for itself in an isolated neighbourhood. When there is no ice procurable, the fish must be placed in a dish on the stone floor, where it will be coolest. When there is a large safe it is a good plan to set a dish of ice within it, and cover the safe itself with the non-conducting flannel.

DIETARIAN.—It is very likely caused by your frequent trips upstairs. In attending to your numerous household duties. It would be advisable for you to reduce the number of these trips; or, if you must ascend the stairs frequently, do so slowly, halting for a minute or two in the centre of each flight. If this does not reduce the frequency of the heart palpitation, you should consult a physician.

L. G.—Place some coarse brown paper (the soft kind) on both sides of the spots, then press carefully with a hot iron. Change the paper often as it absorbs the grease. If the goods are so rich or delicate that the iron is likely to injure them, try friction by using raw cotton; rub the spots off, changing the cotton often. If the material is soiled or stained in many places, rip the article and wash it in tepid water softened with pulverised borax. It can be made to look as good as new.

GRINDLE.—All pastry, and particularly puff paste, should be handled as little and as lightly as possible, or it will be heavy. When making a rich paste, care should be taken to make the butter and the flour-and-water paste exactly the same consistency before rolling them together. To do this the butter should be wrung in a cloth to remove the moisture, and then worked in a basin until it is sufficiently soft. The success of all pastry depends to a great extent on the temperature of the oven, which should be made very hot.

OLATHE.—Have two shallow dishes, one of moderately hot, the other of cold water. To the first dish, which contains, say, a quart of water, add a desert-spoonful of ammonia. Now take your brushes, one by one, and keep dipping the bristles up and down in the water (being careful not to wet the backs), and in a minute or two the dirt and dust will come out of them as if by magic, leaving them beautifully white. Now dip up and down several times in the second dish, containing the clear water, to rinse them, shake well, and place to drain across a rack or towel horse. No soap is needed, and no rubbing with the hands.

L. Y.—The year 1900 is not a leap year, because, according to the Gregorian calendar, no century years are leap years unless they are multiples of four hundred. The Gregorian calendar was adopted in Rome and other parts of Italy, as well as in Spain and Portugal, on October 15th, 1582; it was adopted in England on January 1st, 1752. The addition of a day every fourth year, or leap year, does not exactly correct the difference between the civil and the solar years, and this difference amounts to about three days in four hundred years. To correct this, no extra day is added in century years, except when they are divisible by four hundred without a remainder. According to this rule, the years 1900, 2100, 2300, &c., are ordinary years, and 2000, 2400, 2800, &c., are leap years.

THE LONDON READER can be sent to any part of the world, post free Three-halpence Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence. The yearly subscription for the Monthly Part, including Christmas Part, is Eight shillings and Eightpence, post-free.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of any Bookseller.

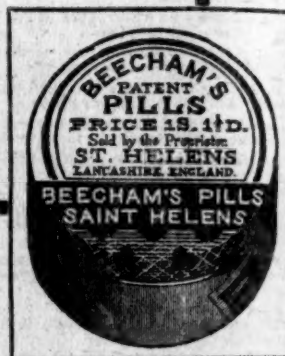
NOTICE.—December and Christmas Double Part (477 and 478) is Now Ready, price One Shilling; post free, One Shilling and Threepence.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 23, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

*. We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

WORTH A GUINEA A BOX.

BEECHAM'S PILLS



WILL MAKE YOU
LOOK

WELL,

These family favourites are composed entirely of Medicinal Herbs, and are warranted free from mercury or other poisonous substance. They can harm no one, and may be given to children or to the aged and infirm with perfect safety. They cleanse the stomach and bowels and purify the blood; invigorate the whole nervous system, and give tone and energy to the muscles.

FEEL

BEECHAM'S PILLS have stood the test of over fifty years without the publication of testimonials. Parents recommend them to their children. Friends recommend them to one another, and **BEECHAM'S PILLS** recommend themselves.

WELL,

AND
KEEP

The Manufactory at St. Helens is a model of system and cleanliness, and the care bestowed on their manufacture ensures **BEECHAM'S PILLS** being always reliable.

WELL.

6,000,000 Boxes are sold annually, and wherever tried they have been adopted as the specific to be depended on for defeating those evils which usually assail health in our daily lives, and if taken in time will ward off many a serious illness.

Sold everywhere in Boxes, price 1/1½ (56 pills) and 2/9 (168 pills).

BEECHAM'S

RECOMMENDS ITSELF.

TOOTH = =

It is Efficacious, Economical, Cleanses the Teeth,
Perfumes the Breath, and is a Reliable
and Pleasant Dentifrice.

PASTE = =

IN COLLAPSIBLE TUBES.

ONE SHILLING EACH.